

Reviving Tradition at the Olufuko Festival 2016
– Girls' Initiation Ritual in Contemporary Namibia

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Referat</p> <p>Pohjois-Namibiassa, Outapin kaupungissa, järjestetään vuosittain elo-syyskuun vaihteessa Olufuko-festivaali. Olufuko on tyttöjen aikuistumisrituaali, jota on perinteisesti harjoitettu Ovambo-heimojen keskuudessa. Rituaalin aikana tyttöjen sosiaalinen status muuttuu tytöstä naiseksi. Tämän traditiota edustavan rituaalin ympärille on järjestetty jokavuotinen festivaali vuodesta 2012 lähtien. Olufuko-festivaalin myötä rituaalin ympärille oli kehittynyt kaupallinen puoli, kun rituaali itse edustaa traditiota.</p> <p>Luterilainen kirkko on jäsenmäärältään Namibian suurin ja se vastustaa voimakkaasti rituaalia. Ihmiset elävät kahden tulen välissä; toisella laidalla on perinne, jota halutaan ylläpitää, ja toisella kirkko, jolla on suuri rooli ihmisten elämässä. Etnografinen tutkielmani vastaa kysymyksiin, mitä Olufukossa tapahtuu, mitkä ovat rituaalin eri vaiheet ja roolit, ja mitä eri tahot ajattelevat rituaalista. Koska rituaali herättää Namibiassa voimakkaita tunteita, olen halunnut avata tätä kenttää tässä tutkielmassa.</p> <p>Aineistona olen käyttänyt kenttätöymateriaaliani. Osallistuin vuonna 2016 Olufuko-festivaaliin ja elin initioitavien tyttöjen keskuudessa koko rituaaliviikon. Kenttätöyjakso oli osa Namibian yliopiston Olufuko-tutkimusta, jossa toimin tutkimusassistenttina. Tutkimusryhmä haastatteli yhteensä 35 initioitavaa tyttöä, 25 huoltajaa, viisi naista, jotka olivat jo käyneet Olufukon läpi, 28 festivaalikävijää, kaksi Namungangaa (rituaalivetäjät), yhtä Meekulua (rituaaliavustaja), Outapin kaupungin valtuustoa, yhtä anglikaanikirkon edustajaa ja luterilaisen kirkon emerituspiispaa. Osa haastatteluista tehtiin englanniksi ja osa oshiwamboksi. Kaikki haastattelut on litteroitu ja käännetty englanniksi. Materiaali on Namibian yliopiston hallussa.</p> <p>Tässä tutkielmassa käytän lähestymistapana Richard Schechnerin performanssiteoriaa sekä tarkastelen rituaalin liminaalisuutta Victor Turnerin rituaalteorian valossa. Turnerin teoria initioitavien tasa-arvoisuudesta ei täysin toteutunut Olufukossa. Rituaalin aikana vallitsi tietty arvojärjestys tyttöjen keskuudessa. Lisäksi tyttöjen heimotausta tuli esiin pukeutumisessa. Työssäni tarkastelen performanssiteorian valossa rituaalin eri rooleja. Pohdin, millä tavalla rituaali toimii sekä transportaationa että transformaationa. Rituaalivetäjien roolit voidaan nähdä transportaationa, sillä rituaalin jälkeen he palaavat takaisin samaan rooliin, mistä lähtivät. Tämän lisäksi rituaalivetäjät toimivat kuljettajina, jotka kuljettavat initioitavat tytöt aikuisuuden satamaan. Tyttöjen rooli puolestaan voidaan nähdä transformaationa; he muuttuvat pysyvästi tytöistä naisiksi.</p> <p>Lopuksi pohdin eri tahojen kantoja Olufukosta. Namibian luterilainen kirkko näkee Olufukon pakanallisena ja vahingollisena toimintana. Samoin tekee Namibian ihmisoikeusjärjestö, NamRights, jonka mukaan rituaali on osa lapsiavioliittoa. Olufukon puolustajiin lukeutuu maan ensimmäinen presidentti Sam Nujoma, joka näkee rituaalin osana Namibian omaa perinnettä, minkä juuret eivät ole kolonialismissa. Huoltajat haluavat lapsensa kuuluvan sukuketjuun, jota rituaali yhdistää. Rituaaliin osallistutaan, koska niin ovat tehneet äidit ja heidän äitinsä läpi historian. Aineistosta nousi myös esiin vääristynyt kuva rituaalista. Monet namibialaiset puhuvat rituaalista ”<i>traditional marriage</i>” -termillä. Tämä antaa kuvan, että rituaalin aikana mennään naimisiin, vaikka tämä ei havaintojeni mukaan pidä paikkaansa. Perinteisesti rituaalin jälkeen on järjestetty hääseremonia, joka on ollut paljon vaatimattomampi kuin itse initiaatio.</p> <p>Rituaalin ympärillä liikkuu paljon huhuja. Monet ajattelevat, että rituaalin aikana miehet käyttävät nuoria tyttöjä seksuaalisesti hyväksi. Nämä väittämät eivät havaintojeni mukaan pitäneet paikkansa. Rituaalivetäjien haastatteluissa kävi ilmi, että Olufukoon ei ole koskaan kuulunut miehiä.</p>		
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1. Introduction

I stood inside the *ondjugo*,¹ waiting for the girls to arrive. The sun had set in the town of Outapi, and it was dark outside. This was the part of the *Olufuko*² ritual, where the girls would crawl into adulthood and transform into women. Inside the *ondjugo*, an electric light in the ceiling illuminated the small space. I was there alone, waiting. I had heard people say that during *Olufuko* an old man would test the virginity of the initiates by sexually abusing them in the *ondjugo*. There was no man inside the *ondjugo*, only me. The ritual leader, *Namunganga*, stood outside, at the doorstep of the *ondjugo* with her legs outstretched. The girls had to go through her legs to get inside. Slowly, one by one, the girls started to enter. They crawled in from a small doorway. Some of the initiates crept with their eyes closed and were clearly nervous. Inside the *ondjugo* they stood up and waited in silence.³

1.1. Olu-What?

Olufuko is a girls' initiation ritual, practised in the Ovambo society in north Namibia. In the late 19th century, when missionaries came to South West Africa (SWA, now known as Namibia), they saw people practising their traditional culture. The Ovambo practises were seen as heathen and therefore condemned, including the *Olufuko* ritual. Regardless of the missionaries' attempt to dispose of the traditional practise of *Olufuko*, the ritual is still being practised in different parts of northern Namibia. In 2012, the town of Outapi in the Omusati region arranged the first *Olufuko* Festival. Since then, the festival has been arranged annually and the amount of attendants has increased. Yet the *Olufuko* has also seen rejection in contemporary Namibia. Some people and organisations such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) and National Society for Human Rights of Namibia (NamRights) have strongly opposed the practise of *Olufuko*.

The *Olufuko* ritual has strong supporters and opposition. The supporters see the practise as upholding the Ovambo tradition and culture, whereas the opposition see it as a harmful practise that should not be followed in contemporary Namibia. This thesis is an ethnographical research where the

¹ The *ondjugo* is the woman's bedroom in a traditional homestead.

² *Olufuko* is a girls' initiation ritual, practised in north Namibia.

³ Field notes, 27.8.2016.

Olufuko is seen through the eyes of performance theory. My aim is to answer the following questions: what happens in Olufuko and what are the different views and opinions on Olufuko? Through this approach I hope to correct some of the misconceptions that remain around the Olufuko ritual and hopefully help create dialogue between the two opposed arguments.

I attended the Olufuko Festival in 2016 as a research assistant in a study conducted by the University of Namibia (UNAM). I lived with the initiates the whole initiation week. My thesis is an anthropological study in comparative religion. My focus is on the Olufuko ritual in the light of performance theory which I use to analyse the ritual. I begin my thesis by describing the earlier research of Olufuko and similar initiation rites. Then, I briefly describe UNAM's Olufuko project. In the second chapter, I explain the context of the Olufuko ritual and describe the historical background of Namibia, the belief system of the Ovambo people, and the rising of nationalism in Namibia. In the third chapter, I explain my ethnographical methods, consisting of fieldwork and interviews. In the fourth chapter, I describe the Olufuko ritual as it was conducted at the Olufuko Festival 2016 and discuss the festival side of the event. In the fifth chapter, I go through the different reactions and opinions on Olufuko and discuss their significance. In the final chapter, I sum up my work and review the future of Olufuko.

1.2. Earlier Research

Olufuko is an old ritual and it has interested several researchers. Emil Liljeblad's ethnographic collection⁴ of the Ovambo lifestyle from the 1900s is one of the largest ethnographical descriptions of the Ovambo. Liljeblad lived in northern Namibia in the early 20th century and served as a missionary for the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission. He collected over 1430 items and had over a hundred informants telling him about traditional Ovambo life. Liljeblad also encouraged the local people to write down descriptions of their culture. In Liljeblad's archives, there are several texts about *Ohango* – the girls' initiation ritual. These documents are held in different archives in Finland: the Finnish Mission Society Collection, the Finnish National Archives, and at the Helsinki

⁴ Emil Liljeblad's collection of Ovambo Folklore was collected in 1930–1932.

University Library.⁵ Researcher Märta Salokoski's study about Namibian rituals and ritual change in pre-colonial and colonial Ovamboland is mainly based on Liljeblad's collection. She points out that the majority of Liljeblad's informants were men and as a result Liljeblad's collection is from a male perspective, while the female aspects of Ovambo culture are under-represented. Out of Liljeblad's informants 99 were men and 11 women.⁶ This means that his descriptions of girls' initiation rituals such as Olufuko, *Efundula*, and Ohango could be partly defective.

Tiia Riitta Hjort af Ornäs wrote her master's thesis about *Efundula*⁷ in which she describes the path of the ritual against the Kwanyama cultural background. Hjort's research is primarily based on Liljeblad's collection and she too recognises the problem with Liljeblad's informants. Hjort also mentions that it is problematic that the informants were all Christians and she questions Liljeblad's rhetorical style and the way he describes the 'pagans'.⁸ Hjort also uses *Ovamboland* (1911) by Hermann Tönjes as a source of information. Tönjes was a German missionary who wrote a holistic ethnographical description of the 'heathen' lifestyle of the Ovambo. In addition to these texts, Hjort uses scripts from a Portuguese missionary Carlos Esterman and American ethnographer Edwin Loeb. Hjort claims that the ritual leader in *Efundula* was a circumcised elder male.⁹ According to my informants in Olufuko, the ritual leader has always been female. There are also other differences between Olufuko and Hjort's description of *Efundula*¹⁰ which could be explained by local differences. *Efundula* is practised among the Kwanyama people but its structure is basically the same as in Olufuko and Ohango, practised among the Ondonga people. They are essentially the same ritual but expressed in different dialects.¹¹

Heike Becker is an anthropologist whose research focuses on Namibia. Her article on *Efundula*¹² was based on several field research periods between 1996 and 1999. At that time the idea of the Olufuko Festival was not yet established. In her article she argues that the ritual has changed and it has become shorter. The

⁵ Salokoski 2006, 51–54.

⁶ Salokoski 2006, 53.

⁷ See *Efundula – Tyttöjen aikuistumisrituaali Ambo-kuanjamakulttuurin kokonaisuudessa*.

⁸ Hjort 1987, 2.

⁹ Hjort 1987, 78–79.

¹⁰ In example Hjort describes that the initiates danced in the first day and that symbolises fertility. In Olufuko the girls did not dance until the last day. They had to stay calm and quiet and sit in the shades like royalty.

¹¹ Miettinen 2005, 50; Becker 2006, 36.

¹² Becker's article "Efundula: Women's Initiation, Gender and Sexual Identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Northern Namibia" appears in *Re-thinking Sexualities in Africa* which was published by The Nordic Africa Institute in 2006.

Efundula lasts only for three days whereas the Olufuko can take six days. Becker's article focuses on the sexual identity and gender issues of the initiation. She points out that gender and sexual identities in post-colonial Namibia are not entirely determined by Christian discourse. The traditional cultural aspect also has an effect on gender and sexual identities. According to Becker "[s]ome vocal Namibian feminist activists, however, have begun, in the process of reclaiming their 'roots', to question the hegemonic colonial assertions of a highly-patriarchal Owambo past."¹³ Even though the organisers of the Olufuko Festival and the ritual leaders encourage the initiates to stay in school and finish their degrees, at the same time Olufuko promotes traditional values. The Namungangas teach the girls how to be good mothers and wives and urged the girls to respect their parents.¹⁴

Erastus Kautondokwa's master's thesis *Olufuko Revisited: Female Initiation in Contemporary Ombadja, Northern Namibia* is an anthropological study on Olufuko. Kautondokwa's thesis is an ethnographic study in which he observed the Olufuko ceremonies, conducted in Ombadja and Outapi in 2012 and 2013. He analyses the post-independence Olufuko in the light of Namibian identity discourse. Kautondokwa has unique material on the Olufuko which is practised in rural areas that is more intimate than the ritual at the Olufuko festival. The only imperfection is that his observation remain limited due to the form of his fieldwork. He did not stay with the girls for the whole duration of the ritual and therefore he does not have any material from their early morning activities. Despite this shortage of information, Kautondokwa offers an insightful description of the ritual. One of the most interesting elements in his study is the description of a girl who attended Olufuko with Western-style clothes on.¹⁵ This could imply that the ritual is changing and adopting new features and thus answering to contemporary needs.

Kim Groop from Åbo Akademi wrote an article in 2014 on Olufuko ("Between Pietistic Heritage and Olufuko Revival: Female Initiation and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia"). In it, he describes the arrival of the Finnish missionaries to Namibia and what effects it had on the local people and their tradition. He also widens his study to examine the debate of the Olufuko Festival and ELCIN's opposition to it. In addition to the archival material, Groop

¹³ Becker 2006, 54.

¹⁴ The teachings were in Oshiwambo and I did not get the precise content of the moral lessons, but it was explained to me briefly afterword's.

¹⁵ Kautondokwa 2014, 27–28.

has interviewed two informants who had gone through Olufuko in 1978 and 1988. Groop compares the material to the modern-day debate around the Olufuko Festival. Groop's article focuses mainly on the Olufuko debate and the Finnish Lutheran Mission's stand on it in the early 20th century.¹⁶

Olufuko is a Bantu-based ritual. Therefore it is not surprising that there are similarities between Olufuko and other Bantu-related puberty rituals. Audrey Richards' study of Chisungu is one of the classic studies of girls' initiation ceremonies. Her research was conducted among the Bemba in the northeast of Zambia in 1931. At that time, it was one of the few studies that concentrated on girls' initiation. Richards describes in detail the different steps of the Chisungu.¹⁷ There are similarities between Olufuko and Chisungu, for example, in both rituals, the girls have to do domestic duties such as the stamping of grain.

In the earlier studies, it is clear that the primary information rises from the archives. Except for Kautondokwa's research, none of these studies were ethnographical studies on the Olufuko Festival. Before UNAM's project, no one had stayed with the initiates through the whole ritual at the Olufuko Festival. It is problematic to rely only on archival material, provided by missionaries in the late 19th and early 20th century. The Christian missionaries had their own agenda in Namibia as they wanted to 'liberate' the local Namibian people from their 'pagan' ways.¹⁸ The archival material is written from the colonial-Christian point of view and should thus be viewed in critical light. Therefore it was important for the UNAM Olufuko research team to conduct the fieldwork in Outapi in 2016. We got first-hand information and were able to observe what really happens during Olufuko at the Olufuko Festival. There have been many rumours about the tone of the ritual and hence clarification was needed.

1.3. Olufuko Project

Since its inception, the Olufuko Festival has met opposition from different directions. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Namibia sees the Olufuko Festival as a practise of heresy.¹⁹ The Namibian human rights organization,

¹⁶ Groop 2014.

¹⁷ Richards 1982.

¹⁸ See, for example, *Taikasauva ja Risti* (Magic Wand and the Cross) by O.E. Närhi, 1929. In his foreword, he is sure that Christianity will spread in Namibia and take over the old Ovambo tradition.

¹⁹ Interview with Emeritus Bishop Shanghala 29.8.2016.

NamRights, accuses Olufuko as practise of child marriage.²⁰ The Outapi Town Council wanted to open a fact-based discussion and had an interest in the UNAM research project. It is also clear that the town of Outapi wants to increase their tourism rates and Olufuko Festival contributes to tourism and economic activity.

The Outapi Town Council approached UNAM and requested for a comprehensive study on Olufuko. They wanted to clarify the misunderstandings that were harming the Olufuko Festival. Professor Hina MuAshekele, who is a member of the Outapi community and currently working at the Multidisciplinary Research Centre in UNAM, became the research coordinator. The UNAM team was established in early 2016 and it included the following members: Doctor Michael Akuupa from Labour Research Resources Institute in Namibia, Erastus Kautondokwa who has written his Master's Thesis to the Western Cape University about Olufuko,²¹ Nena Shivute who was my research partner in the field and Hiskia Akuupa, a postgraduate research fellow at the faculty of Education at UNAM. The aim was to get a wide picture on Olufuko. The Olufuko project wanted to dig into the history and current situation of Olufuko: how Olufuko was practised before Christianization, how it has changed, and what does Olufuko mean to the people.

I got involved with the research in the beginning of 2016. At that time, I was an exchange student at UNAM. I have been following the news about the Olufuko Festival since it's first year in 2012. In my studies of religions at the University of Helsinki, I have written a paper about Efundula, the Kwanyaman initiation ritual that is quite similar to Olufuko. Therefore it was obvious that I would want to write my thesis on Olufuko. I knew that the Olufuko Festival is arranged annually in August in the town of Outapi and contacted the Town Council to get more information about it. They forwarded my enquiry to professor MuAshekele, who had started his Olufuko project. He contacted me and we met a few times before he took me under his wings. I became a research assistant and my role was to attend the fieldwork period in August 2016 and gather information by observing and interviewing. Professor MuAshekele allowed me to use the data that we collected for my master's thesis and we agreed that Dr Akuupa would be my Namibian supervisor. I am very thankful for this opportunity and very grateful for the feedback I got from Dr Akuupa.

²⁰ Nangoloh 2014, 2.

²¹ *Olufuko Revisited: Female initiation in contemporary Ombadja, Northern Namibia* by Erastus Kautondokwa.

The Olufuko project itself is still an ongoing study. The Namibian members of the team have presented a summary of the research results to the Outapi Town Council. The final study is expected to be published in 2018.

2. Background

2.1. History

To understand modern day Namibia, the complex history of Olufuko and also the cultural state of mind, one needs to take a look into history. Why is it so important for some Namibians to revive their tradition and why is Olufuko seen as a promoter of national identity and pride?²² Gaining independence after a long period under colonial rule made the Namibians contemplate about the meaning of being Namibian. In the following chapters, I give a brief overview to the history of Namibia.

2.1.1. Under German Colonial Rule

The early Ovambo were agro-pastoralist who stemmed from the north and northeast migrated Bantu. They settled to the Kunene and Kavango Rivers in the northern part of what is now called Namibia.²³ When the Germans arrived in South West Africa (SWA)²⁴ in the 19th century, there were no borders that would correspond to modern day Namibia. The Namib Desert²⁵ kept travellers and traders from resettling into the hinterlands and influence the local societies. In 1884, at the Berlin Conference, Europeans divided Africa into colonial states without consideration of any ethnic kingdoms. For example, a northern borderline divided the Uukwanyama kingdom and its subjects were spread between the territory border of the SWA and Angola.²⁶ As a result, in Southern Angola there are people who have the same cultural practises as in northern Namibia which showed at the Olufuko Festival in 2016 as there were also girls from Angola attending the ritual.

German claimed SWA in 1884. The rule was harsh for the local people. By the beginning of the 20th century, the German administration had committed systematic destruction of the indigenous people and conducted genocides of the Herero and Nama. The aim was to gain land for the German settlers by expropriating it from the locals. In ten years, from 1903 to 1913, the number of Europeans had increased from 5 000 to 15 000 settlers.²⁷ At the same time, mining

²² Olufuko Magazine Vol. 4, 5 (author unknown).

²³ Salokoski 2006, 61.

²⁴ South West Africa is now known as Namibia.

²⁵ Namib is a Nama word meaning 'shield' (Katjavivi 1986, 29).

²⁶ Närhi 1929, 95; Katjavivi 1986, 29; Wallace and Kinahan 2011, 116; Soggot 1986, 3.

²⁷ Miettinen 2005, 102.

industry was slowly increasing in Tsumeb and around 1908 the first diamond in Lüderitz was found which started the diamond industry. As work on infrastructure began, the German administration needed labour for the railways, mines, and harbours. Because of the genocides of the Herero and Nama, the Germans started to look up north to the Ovamboland for workers. The Ovambo²⁸ men became a new source of cheap migrant labour.²⁹

During German colonial rule SWA was divided into two. The southern and central parts of Namibia were part of a territory called the Police Zone.³⁰ Ovamboland was situated outside of the Police Zone, in the northern part of SWA. The push factors for the Ovambo men to become migrant labourers were, among other things, the loss of cattle in the rinderpest outbreak of 1897 and a continually poor harvest in the first years of the 20th century. The wages of the migrated labour were small and the working conditions were poor, but it was an escape from extreme poverty. The homesteads and families had to adopt into the new situation, when the men were recruited to the mines and railways.³¹

Germany lost all of its colonies by the end of the World War I. The newly established League of Nations declared SWA a British protectorate. It was given as a mandate territory to the Union of South Africa in the beginning of the 1920s.³²

2.1.2. Under South African Colonial Rule

When the German colonial rule ended in SWA, the local people anticipated a change that would come along with the South African administration. The people thought that their life would go in a better direction and that they soon would gain their lands back and become independent. Unfortunately, this was not the case. South Africa wanted to make SWA its fifth colony³³ and ensure the supply of

²⁸ The Ovambo is one of the ethnic groups of Namibia. The other ones are the Basters and Coloureds, Caprivians, Damara, Herero, Kavango, Nama, San, Tswana, and Whites. (Buys & Nambala 2003, xxiii.)

²⁹ Katjavivi 1986, 43, 47, 49; Wallace and Kinahan 2011, 131; Miettinen 2005, 101–102; Soggot 1986, 17.

³⁰ The Police Zone was the line that divided SWA into two different sections. It was created by the German colonial administration. The idea was to provide a 'safe' area for the white settlers. The local population was situated in the northern parts of Namibia. Later under the South African (SA) rule the administration used the same line to divide the land, this time it was called the Red line. (Melber 2005, 138; Werner 1993, 139; Miettinen 2005, 103.)

³¹ Melber 2005, 138; Werner 1993, 139; Miettinen 2005, 103–104.

³² Soggot 1986, 17.

³³ Katjavivi 1986, 55–56. The other South African colonies were Natal Colony, Transvaal Colony, Cape Colony, and Orange River Colony.

cheap labour. Therefore, they created labour recruiting organisations such as SLO (Southern Labour Organization) and NLO (Northern Labour Organization), which recruited black and coloured men to work.³⁴

The SLO recruited workers for the diamond mines in the south, while NLO recruited men for the northern mines and farms. In 1948, these two organizations merged into one, called SWANLA (South West Africa Native Labour Association).³⁵ What was the significance of these organizations? The migrant labour system meant that the recruited men had to leave their homesteads to work on the other side of SWA and leave their families behind. The women, children, and elderly were left back home to take care of the cattle and the harvest. Because women and the elderly were not physically as strong as the men, it led to a decrease in production of the harvest and cattle, making the families more and more dependent on the wages that the men were earning in the mines. The men's contract forced them to be away from home for 12 to 18 months.³⁶ Women had to step in and make decisions that were usually made by men. This caused changes in tradition, which used to make a strict difference between men's and women's work.³⁷ Among the migrant labourers new political organizations were born. One of them was OPO (Ovamboland People's Organization) which later became SWAPO (South West Africa People Organization) and played a crucial role in Namibia's struggle for independence and has been the ruling party since independence was achieved in 1990.³⁸

In 1948, after the National Party won the elections in South Africa, the apartheid system was established. It was a legislated segregation system that separated whites and blacks culturally, socially, and physically from each other. From the 1960s, this racist separation system was internationally criticised. South Africa eventually modified the apartheid system and developed 'homelands'. The idea was to keep every ethnic group in their own area and prevent them from mixing up with each other. The Ovambos were kept in Ovamboland, Hereros in Hereroland, the San people in Bushmanland, and so on. Every ethnic group had

³⁴ Miettinen 2005, 106; Katjavivi 1986, 64–65.

³⁵ Miettinen 2005, 106; Katjavivi 1986, 64–65.

³⁶ Miettinen 2005, 114–115; Voipio 1981, 114–115, 118.

³⁷ Voipio 1981, 114–115, 118. Traditionally, the father named the baby. (Närhi 1929, 22; Miettinen 2005, 53.) In a situation where the father was far south working and was not expected to arrive back home any time soon, the woman had to do the naming. This caused change in the tradition.

³⁸ Miettinen 2005, 114–115; Katjavivi 1986 68.

their own designated living area and they were not allowed to move freely without permission.³⁹

The winds of freedom were blowing over the African continent by the 1960s. From the 1950s, one country after another gained independence from their respective colonial powers. Suppression led to resistance in SWA, which in turn led to war in the 1970s. SWAPO's military wing PLAN (Peoples Liberation Army of Namibia) began to make guerrilla attacks against the South African military. The South African troops made counterattacks towards SWAPO and PLAN with the main battlefield in North Namibia and South Angola. This affected the lives of the civilians, many of whom had to flee to Tanzania, Zambia, or Zimbabwe.⁴⁰ There is no study available on whether Olufuko was practised in time of exile. On the 21st of March 1990, Namibia gained its independence and the apartheid regime in Namibia ended. After independence the former 'homelands' were turned into different regions. The former Ovamboland is now divided into Omusati, Oshana, Ohangwena, and Oshikoto regions. The town of Outapi is the administrative capital of Omusati. The supporters of the Olufuko Festival see the festival as an unifying factor as it brings together to Omusati the regions of Oshana, Ohangwena, Oshikoto, and Kunene.⁴¹

2.2. Cosmology and Religion

In pre-colonial times, before the arrival of Christianity, the world of the Ovambo society was thought to be divided into two: the visible world and the invisible.⁴² Even though the worldview in Namibia is now mainly Christian, the two components, the visible and the invisible, are still present. At the Olufuko Festival 2016, elements of the traditional belief system could be observed.⁴³ Therefore, in this chapter I describe the religion and the cosmology of the pre-colonial Ovambo. To avoid any Christianisation of the tradition, I use the same terms and descriptions as Märta Salokoski in her study *How Kings Are Made – How Kingship Changes*.⁴⁴ I use the term spirit or *Kalunga* (the highest spirit) to

³⁹ Miettinen 2005, 116–117; Kiljunen 1981, 93, 96.

⁴⁰ Soggot 1986, 286–288; Katjavivi 1990, 59–61.

⁴¹ Olufuko Magazine Vol 4, 5 (author unknown).

⁴² Peltola 1958, 23.

⁴³ For example, the ritual leaders (Namungangas) were special women who had the knowledge of the ritual and they could be seen as spiritual actors. Other traditional features were the holy fire burning throughout the ritual and the herb drink the girls had to drink on the fifth day.

⁴⁴ Salokoski 2006.

indicate the powers of the beyond. The terms spiritual agent or actor refer to a person in the visible world who has spiritual powers. These persons are, for example, witches, diviners, and sorcerers. Spiritual power is the capability to communicate with the invisible world and influence the human life in the visible world.⁴⁵

According to Salokoski, there were several ideas about how the world was structured. “These ideas seem to reflect different traditions that have survived in the local consciousness”, Salokoski argues.⁴⁶ According to one description the world consisted of three layers: sky, earth, and the netherworld. People lived on earth, in the middle. Another describes the world as two grain baskets on top of each other.⁴⁷ Teddy Aarni claims that the pre-colonial Ovambo saw the beginning of the world at the birth of the first ancestor.⁴⁸ According to Aarni, the Ovambo were not interested in the beginning of life and therefore the differences between these myths were not relevant.⁴⁹

The Ovambo had different powers of the beyond. The highest spirit was Kalunga. According to Aarni, the Ovambos did not know how to explain the concept of Kalunga to the missionaries when interviewed. The missionaries interpreted Kalunga as the Christian God.⁵⁰ According to Salokoski, “The term Kalunga was taken by the missionaries to depict the Christian God”.⁵¹ Historian Kari Miettinen argues that Kalunga was not worshipped nor was he a divine judge. Rather he was a force behind every living thing and the ancestors and other spirits were connected to him. Kings were seen as the terrestrial symbols of Kalunga.⁵²

There were two kinds of spirits in the Ovambo society: ancestral spirits (*omuthithi*, plural *aathithi*) and evil spirits (*oshiluli*, plural *iiluli*).⁵³ The ancestral spirits were the spirits of a deceased relative who had a meaningful role in the family. The ancestral spirits could cause both good and bad things to the living. If people broke taboos it was believed that the ancestors would become angry and

⁴⁵ Salokoski 2006, 132.

⁴⁶ Salokoski 2006, 133.

⁴⁷ Salokoski 2006, 133–134.

⁴⁸ Aarni 1982, 32.

⁴⁹ Aarni 1982, 31–32.

⁵⁰ Aarni 1982, 95–96.

⁵¹ Salokoski 2006, 54.

⁵² Miettinen 2005, 79–80; Salokoski 2006, 137–138.

⁵³ Miettinen 2005, 80–81; Salokoski 2006, 145–146.

cause bad things to happen. Generally people were afraid of the ancestors.⁵⁴

According to Salokoski:

It seems that in the times of great social changes in the mid- and late 1800s, the ancestors had more reason to be angry and to ask for blood sacrifices because the taboos and customs that they guarded were more commonly broken than earlier.⁵⁵

In other words, the ancestors were seen as invisible authorities, guarding the tradition of the Ovambo. The angry ancestors were appeased with sacrifices of beer, grain, and porridge or with blood sacrifices, for example, by slaughtering a cow. The ancestors could become malevolent if the people did not show respect to them or if they were forgotten. The spirits could cause sickness or even death.⁵⁶ Evil spirits were the spirits of the dead who were rejected by society, like witches. The maltreatment of a witch could cause a grudge carrying over into the afterlife and bad things were seen as the deceased witch's revenge.⁵⁷

There were several spiritual actors in the Ovambo society. Diviners were people who had the ability to communicate with spirits, acquired through years of training, and adhering to a hierarchy between them. Those at the highest level could break spells of sorcery.⁵⁸ A sorcerer, on the other hand, was a person who used materials, medicines, rites, and spells for illegitimate purposes. According to anthropologist Maija Hiltunen, a person did not have to have special attributes to become a sorcerer. "Anyone who can acquire the necessary magic substance can practice sorcery".⁵⁹ Hiltunen adds that the spiritual power of the sorcerer came from bad magic.⁶⁰ Finally, a witch someone who had inherited psychophysical power to harm others.⁶¹

According to Lovisa Nampala and Vilho Shigwedha, the Ovambo belief system consisted of different rituals, ceremonies, festivals, religious objects, and sacred places.⁶² There were three different types of rituals in Ovambo tradition: 1) rites of passage, 2) calendar rites, and, 3) crisis rites. Rites of passage were birth, initiation, marriage, and burial rituals. In these rites, the individual went from one phase to another.⁶³ According to Aarni, Kalunga has never been involved in the

⁵⁴ Salokoski 2006, 145.

⁵⁵ Salokoski 2006, 147.

⁵⁶ Miettinen 2005, 80–81; Salokoski 2006, 147.

⁵⁷ Salokoski 2006, 148.

⁵⁸ Salokoski 2006, 151–153.

⁵⁹ Hiltunen 1986, 106.

⁶⁰ Hiltunen 1986, 106.

⁶¹ Hiltunen 1986, 27.

⁶² Nampala and Shigwedha 2006, 20.

⁶³ Aarni 1982, 38–43.

rites of passage but he has been mentioned in the calendar and crisis rites.⁶⁴ Calendar rites were related to harvesting crop. Crisis rites, on the other hand, had to do with severe drought, infectious diseases, and starvation.⁶⁵ According to Hiltunen, there were two main features in Ovambo religion: the importance of preserving the chain of lineage and the regulations of everyday life. The Ovambo rites were related to the chain of lineage.⁶⁶ This aspect was also mentioned by the girls I interviewed. Some of the girls said that they wanted to follow their tradition by doing something that their grandparents did:

Initiate 20_SK: Because it's something that's done by our gran gran gran [sic.] past years. And we need to follow the examples.

In conclusion, Ovambo cosmology and religion were tightly bound to everyday life. The visible and the invisible worlds were active at the same time; the spiritual actors in the visible world and the ancestors, Kalunga, and evil spirits from the invisible world. The ancestors were the guardians of tradition and got angry easily. Rituals, such as Olufuko, tie the individual to a generational continuity that was and continues to be important in Ovambo society.

2.3. Kinship and Womanhood

In pre-colonial times, the Ovambo societies were matrilineal as the Bantu based communities typically used to be. The matrilineal meant that the inheritance of property followed the maternal line.⁶⁷ According to Märta Salokoski, the economic basis, the political structure, and the religion all descended matrilineally.⁶⁸ Historian Meredith McKittrick argues that due to the matrilineal system the families and the community had a great deal of interest to control their women and especially young girls.⁶⁹ McKittrick adds that the girls' initiation ritual was a form of controlling them and therefore the rite revolves around ritual cleanliness and community health.⁷⁰ The initiation leaders taught the girls to be good wives.⁷¹ This educational aspect was also present at the Olufuko Festival 2016, although the teachings were not just about how to be good wives but also about how to be good and respectful adults.

⁶⁴ Aarni 1982, 38.

⁶⁵ Aarni 1982, 43–45.

⁶⁶ Hiltunen 1993, 34.

⁶⁷ McKittrick 2002, 39; Miettinen 2005, 48; Salokoski 2006, 68.

⁶⁸ Salokoski 2006, 68.

⁶⁹ McKittrick 2002, 39.

⁷⁰ McKittrick 2002, 39.

⁷¹ McKittrick 2002, 39–40.

Family had a significant role in the Ovambo social structure. The family consisted of a husband, wife/wives, and children. Particularly in the pre-colonial era, the Ovambo husband could have several wives.⁷² Even though the Ovambo societies were matrilineal, everyday life was strongly patriarchal.⁷³ According to Miettinen, some of the Ovambo girls were betrothed by their parents. Miettinen continues that even though the parents had decided for the girl, she still had the right to break the engagement when she came of age.⁷⁴ It was also common that a young man proposed a girl directly. In these cases, if a girl was willing to get engaged with him, the young man had to ask permission from the girl's family. Before marriage could take place, the girl had to go through the initiation ceremony.⁷⁵

Regardless of the matrilineal system, the head of the family was the husband. According to Miettinen, as long as the wife lived with the husband she needed to follow his rules. Miettinen describes that the woman did not have to put up with everything. In cases where the marriage became unbearable, the wife could divorce the husband and move back to her parents or with a maternal relative.⁷⁶ Miettinen also explains the privileges of a royal woman. The royal women had different rights than ordinary women. A woman from royal background could marry a non-royal man. She even had the right to marry a man who was already married, but the man was not allowed to marry other women after he had wed a royal woman. In a situation where the wife was from a royal family, she was the head of the household – not the husband.⁷⁷ According to Meredith McKittrick, “[e]ligible girls from the royal clan were initiated first”.⁷⁸ McKittrick describes that in the pre-colonial era one initiate in the group was selected as a leader. Usually, the leading girl was from a wealthy or royal family.⁷⁹ In the Olufuko Festival 2016, the leading girl was from the family of the chief of Ombalantu. In the Ovambo social structure, the king is the highest in the hierarchy and different kingdoms had their own kings. According to Salokoski, rituals and especially initiation rituals could only commence after the king had

⁷² Miettinen 2005, 50.

⁷³ Miettinen 2005, 55.

⁷⁴ Miettinen 2005, 51.

⁷⁵ Miettinen 2005, 51.

⁷⁶ Miettinen 2005, 52.

⁷⁷ Miettinen 2005, 53.

⁷⁸ McKittrick 2002, 41.

⁷⁹ McKittrick 2002, 41.

given his approval.⁸⁰ The Olufuko Festival 2016 started with the arrival of the chief of Ombalantu, Oswin Mukulu. His arrival signaled his approval.

McKittrick points out that the festivities around the Olufuko ritual required livestock and grain. The initiation ceremony was an event where the wealthier families could display their wealth. The families that did not have cattle for slaughter or grain to pound had two options: either postpone their daughter's initiation or initiate their daughter alongside a richer neighbour's daughter.⁸¹ At the Olufuko Festival 2016, the rich neighbour was the town of Outapi. The town provided the cattle, grain, ochre lotion, and salt bricks. Sam Nujoma, the first president of Namibia, donated a cow for slaughter on the opening day of the 2016 festival.

To summarize, I could note that the Ovambo social structure has been hierarchical throughout its history and still remains so. Every kingdom had their own king and their permission was needed when a ritual was to be conducted. The inheritance of property, the economic basis, the political structure, and religion have all descended matrilineally. The head of the family was usually the husband, but women from royal background had their privileges. In a household where the husband was the leader, the women had to obey him. But if the marriage became unbearable for the woman, she was able to divorce her husband.

2.4. Missionaries and Initiation

The missionaries arrived to SWA with the attitude of white supremacy. The African societies had to leave their traditions behind in order to convert to Christianity.⁸² First encounter with the missionaries in northern Namibia happened in 1857. Carl Hugo Hahn and Johannes Rath arrived to Ondonga in July that year. They were a part of the German Rhenish Mission Society (RMS), which adhered to the Lutheran doctrines. Hahn and Rath's stay in Ovamboland was short. By the 30th of July they fled the attack of King Nangolo dhAmutenya who suspected that Rath and Hahn were spies for the Oorlam chief Jonker Afrikaner. The behaviour of the missionaries affected the situation negatively. The

⁸⁰ Salokoski 2006, 68.

⁸¹ McKittrick 2002, 80.

⁸² Høy 1995, 21.

missionaries seemed arrogant and hostile by condemning the traditional rituals as pagan.⁸³

In the mid-1860s, the situation changed as the Ovambo kings were slowly warming up to receive missionaries in their area. In 1866, Hahn went up north for a new mission. Even though the atmosphere towards the missionaries had changed, there were still some obstacles. The RMS had opened new missionary fields in India and therefore they did not have the capability to send missionaries to Ovamboland. This is where the Finnish Missionary Society (FMS, established in 1859) stepped in. Hahn had made contact with the FMS in 1860 and asked them to set up missionary stations in Ovamboland. FMS agreed and the first of their graduates left for the headquarters of the RMS in 1868 to finish their training. In 1870, the first group of Finnish missionaries arrived to SWA.⁸⁴ The first Namibians were baptized in 1883, 13 years after the Finnish missionaries had arrived. According to Kari Miettinen:

Conversion to Christianity on a larger scale first began in Ovamboland in the 1920s, marking an upswing that was preceded by a territorial expansion in mission activity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁸⁵

The SWA administration was not satisfied with the FMS's work. They did not appreciate FMS schooling the local people. The administration saw that the Finns were not promoting the migrant labour system and that the education increased the consciousness of the black population. In the 1920s, the administration allowed the Anglican and the Roman Catholic churches to open missions in the north on the condition that the new denominations had to promise to promote the migrant labour system and that the education they offered should be practical. Before this decision the north was mainly the area of the Lutheran mission. By the end of 1932, the Roman Catholic Church had two mission stations in Uukwambi and one in Ombalantu while the Anglicans had two mission stations in Uukwanyama.⁸⁶ Meredith McKittrick argues that half of the population in Namibia had converted to Christianity by the end of the Second World War.⁸⁷

The girls' initiation rite was one of the most important rituals of the Ovambo. The missionaries from the Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran churches strongly opposed the practise. According to Miettinen, the ritual was

⁸³ Miettinen 2005, 87–88.

⁸⁴ Miettinen 2005, 88–89.

⁸⁵ Miettinen 2005, 90.

⁸⁶ Närhi 1929, 97–99; Peltola 1958, 199; Miettinen 2005, 96–97.

⁸⁷ McKittrick 1998, 258.

strictly forbidden and there were no attempts to Christianise the rite.⁸⁸ In 1924, the rite was banned in the first church regulations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church and the punishment for practising it was severe. The regulations ordered anybody who sent a girl for initiation to be excommunicated from the church.⁸⁹ Miettinen describes that a woman who had gone through the initiation could not be married in church, but at a church office instead. The condemnation of the initiation rite created conflicts because Christian girls were attending the ritual against the missionaries will.⁹⁰ Miettinen points out that the Christian Ovambos never openly questioned the missionaries' views on the initiation rite:

The ground for the prohibition were never discussed at synodal meetings, for example. This might indicate that the Christians basically agreed with the missionaries that ohango [initiation rite] was something unchristian.⁹¹

The Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) sees the practise as unchristian still today.

After World War II and especially in the 1960s there were winds of nationalism blowing throughout the continent of Africa aiming to decolonise the countries. At that time the churches of European origin began to turn into indigenous-led churches.⁹² The Evangelical Lutheran Ovambo-Kavango Church (ELOC) was established as early as 1925, it's roots in FMS. In 1957, the church was formally recognised by the state and in 1960 it had its first native black leader, Leonard Auala who was consecrated as bishop in 1963.⁹³ Later ELOC became ELCIN, today the largest church in Namibia. According to the statistics of CIA's World Factbook 80 to 90 % of Namibians are Christians and 50 % of them are Lutherans.⁹⁴

2.5. Nationalism – One Namibia one nation

During the struggle for Namibia's independence, SWAPO created the slogan 'One Namibia, One Nation'. The idea was to unite the diverse ethnic communities of SWA.⁹⁵ After independence, now as the ruling party, SWAPO realised the challenge to unify people who were claiming and celebrating their ethnic

⁸⁸ Miettinen 2005, 314.

⁸⁹ Miettinen 2005, 314.

⁹⁰ Miettinen 2005, 315.

⁹¹ Miettinen 2005, 315.

⁹² Høy 1995, 18.

⁹³ Høy 1995, 21.

⁹⁴ Central Intelligence Agency 2017.

⁹⁵ Akuupa 2015, 24.

orientations. In this context Michael Akuupa argues that the slogan ‘One Namibia, One Nation’ transformed into ‘Unity in Diversity’ as the citizens of the ‘One Nation’ started to accentuate their ethnic belonging.⁹⁶ The Olufuko ritual can be understood as a practise that reinforces Ovambo ethnicity: people attend to it because it is something that is part of their culture. According to Arvid Høy, ethnicity was turned into a political matter during the colonial rule and played into apartheid policies.⁹⁷ After gaining its independence, Namibia had to unify something that had been segregated for decades.

Akuupa argues in his study of national culture in post-apartheid Namibia that participation and interactions in cultural festivals create the self-identity of an individual.⁹⁸ Akuupa found that people were interested in who they are, what is their ethnic orientation, their national identity, and who are their descendants.⁹⁹ This was also the case in the Olufuko Festival. The majority of the informants were interested in their tradition which was practised by their grandparents. According to Sam Nujoma, the Patron of Olufuko and the first president of Namibia, “a Nation without culture is like a tree without roots”.¹⁰⁰ Nujoma is known for supporting Olufuko and donating money for the festival.¹⁰¹ He sees the Olufuko opposition as “afro-pessimist foreign oriented pressure groups”.¹⁰² Nujoma made an appearance also at the Olufuko Festival 2016.

⁹⁶ Akuupa 2015, 25.

⁹⁷ Høy 1995, 17.

⁹⁸ Akuupa 2015, 28–29.

⁹⁹ Akuupa 2015, 28–29.

¹⁰⁰ Olufuko Magazine Vol 4, 5 (author unknown).

¹⁰¹ See, for example, *New Era* 17.7.2014 “Outapi Raises N\$1.7 mil for Olufuko”; *New Era* 27.7.2015 “Nujoma Underscores Importance of Cultural Values”, or *The Namibian* 1.8.2016 “N\$3 million raised for Olufuko”.

¹⁰² Olufuko Magazine Vol 4, 5 (author unknown).

3. Methodology

3.1. *Olufuko in the Field of Religion*

Olufuko has been an important part of the Ovambo life cycle. Throughout history, Ovambo women have gone through this ritual. Before the Christianisation of Namibia, Olufuko was a part of the traditional Ovambo worldview. A girl could become a respectful woman only by going through Olufuko. It was a disgrace for the whole family if a girl got pregnant before the initiation. In some cases, these pregnant girls were burned to death as a punishment for their actions.¹⁰³ This implies how important it was for society to uphold the purity of young girls.

Late Raimo Harjula, priest and scholar, concentrated in his academic work on the Tanzanian Meru people. During the time Harjula spent in Tanzania, he noticed that in the Tanzanian way-of-life, the religious aspect is not easily defined. According to Harjula, what Finns might call 'religion', in the African context, is a part of everyday life.¹⁰⁴ Separating the everyday and religious life from each other is difficult. Harjula also mentions that religion lives with the people in their everyday lives, in their beliefs and behaviour.¹⁰⁵ Roger Schroeder, who did his study among the Wosera of Papua New Guinea, argues that the concept of religion is an imported term from the Western industrialised society. According to Schroeder in the Wosera context, "traditional religion and culture are virtually inseparable."¹⁰⁶ The same situation could also be observed in Namibia, and therefore I have to be careful not to put Western assumptions to the African context. The reviving of Olufuko has brought the rite into discussion again. The doctrine religion (in this case mainly ELCIN) is actively opposing the old tradition, while members of the church are still attending Olufuko regardless of the church's request to abstain from it. Olufuko is a multi dimensional topic, which shows that people live and practise their tradition against their church's canon and at the same time these people consider themselves Christians. The church sees a contradiction in this situation but the people do not.

Where does Olufuko stand in the field of religion? Linda Woodhead in her article "Five concepts of religion" (2009) proposes a classification of religion by using five concepts: religion as culture, religion as identity, religion as relationship, religion as practice, and religion as power. Émile Durkheim sees

¹⁰³ Miettinen 2005, 322; Salokoski 2006, 238–239.

¹⁰⁴ Harjula 2004, 126.

¹⁰⁵ Harjula 2004, 123.

¹⁰⁶ Schroeder 1992, 13.

religion as a communal and unifying system, which brings people together. Ritual acts as the glue that connects these individuals to each other. According to Durkheim:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all these who adhere to them.¹⁰⁷

Durkheim sees religion and society as inseparable.¹⁰⁸ According to Woodhead, “The assumption seems to be that there is a need for individuals and groups to define who they are (their ‘identity’)”.¹⁰⁹ This is a strong need in postcolonial Namibia where people seem to try to identify what it means to be Namibian and what are the Namibian traditions. After decades of colonial rule and having to adopt the colonial habits, it seems that the people are now eager to revive their customs and culture.¹¹⁰ After independence, several cultural festivals have risen in different towns in Namibia. Olufuko Festival is one of these types of festivals whose main aim seems to be to bring visitors to Outapi. At the Olufuko Festival, the ritual itself was a melting pot where different traditions of the Olufuko ritual was mixed. The festival brought people together over tribal lines and modified the rite to adhere the different traditions.

The Olufuko Festival has modified the Olufuko ritual to serve the needs of different ethnic groups and, at the same time, Olufuko is said to be upholding something old and traditional. According to Catherine Bell, the dilemma in the change of rituals is that rituals “tend to present themselves as the unchanging, time-honored customs of an enduring community.”¹¹¹ Bell argues that, in fact, the rituals have to change in some way and adopt new forms to remain significant for the society.¹¹² According to Fiona Bowie, the things that are taken as correct forms of religion are usually the interpretation of the religious elite such as priests. Bowie continues that the elite is interested in “what their religion ought to be, rather than how it is actually lived by the majority of its adherents.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Durkheim 1995, 44.

¹⁰⁸ Durkheim 1995, 113–114.

¹⁰⁹ Woodhead 2011, 129.

¹¹⁰ The importance of Olufuko could be heard in the speeches of the politicians such as Urban and Rural Development minister Sophia Shaningwa on the opening day of Olufuko Festival 27.8.2016. According to her, culture serves as an unifying factor in society. People need to know their heritage. The first president of Namibia, Sam Nujoma, sent the same message. He came to the Olufuko Festival on the final day to greet the girls and to wish them a safe journey back home. The arrival of these politicians indicated the importance of Namibian tradition.

¹¹¹ Bell 1997, 210.

¹¹² Bell 1997, 220.

¹¹³ Bowie 2006, 21.

My study is an anthropological study of religion on the concept of Olufuko. Using Linda Woodhead's five concepts of religion, I map my study in the concept of religion as practice. According to Woodhead:

The ethnographic approach characteristic of anthropological study also lends itself of an awareness of religion as practice – as something which is lived out, [...] The concept of religion as ritual is found in many anthropological accounts.¹¹⁴

Woodhead adds that rituals have the power to engage individuals into social performances, which may reinforce and intensify certain emotions and commitments.¹¹⁵ My focus is on Olufuko as an initiation ritual, performed regardless of ELCIN's opposition. The Olufuko ritual was practised at the Olufuko Festival and this traditional ritual was surrounded with contemporary festivity. The ritual upheld something traditional but at the same time it had modern-day features. Olufuko is something that is being lived out. In this study, I describe the Olufuko ritual and also open up the different opinions on the rite. I illuminate the view of the opposition as well as the pro-Olufuko stance. In the middle of this debate are the girls and I also shed light on their stand. By this, I attempt to give a holistic view of the Olufuko debate. In the next section, I describe my ethnographical approach and the methods I used during my fieldwork period.

3.2. Ethnography

The study of religion uses methods that are familiar from other social sciences. In my work, I have used an ethnographical approach, usually used in anthropology. It typically includes periods of fieldwork, where the researcher lives with the society she studies. In ethnography, the data is collected from various sources, not just from interviewing or observing. The researcher takes part in the everyday life of the subjects, watching what is happening, listening to what is being taught and told.¹¹⁶ The researcher reflects on the information and is in constant interaction with the research subject.¹¹⁷ In my case, I lived with the girls who were going through the initiation process. I watched their performances and listened to the orders that they were given. My colleague, Nena Shivute, and I asked about the meanings of the different parts of the ritual from the Namungangas (the ritual

¹¹⁴ Woodhead 2011, 132.

¹¹⁵ Woodhead 2011, 132.

¹¹⁶ Atkinson and Hammersley 2007, 1–2.

¹¹⁷ Opas 2004, 153–177.

leaders). I wrote notes during the fieldwork period and kept a diary during that time. I observed and participated in different parts of the rite.

Ethnography is usually perceived as a part of anthropology.¹¹⁸ Minna Opas defines ethnography as a description of otherness, where the researcher aims to understand and explain the subject of the research.¹¹⁹ The idea is to produce new information about different cultures and societies by interacting with the subject. Ethnography as a method is about getting information from the natural environment of the subject. This means that it was necessary for me to attend the Olufuko Festival so that I would be able to get first-hand information about that particular cultural practice. Professor of Anthropology of Education, Nobuo Shimahara who is specialised in Japanese culture, sees three paradigmatic premises that identify ethnographic research:

1) Discovering Cultural Patterns in Human Behavior

An ethnographer sees each one as a subject that provides information about the culture. Informants reflect their culture. In Olufuko the initiates, their parents, and the ritual leaders provided the information of the rite, on the basis of their culture.

2) Emic-Etic

For Shimahara, “[e]thicists believe that the conceptual categories of cultural reality must be determined by the researchers, based on their identification of the causes of cultural phenomena.”¹²⁰ In other words, the researchers describe the culture with their terminology and categories. This means that I describe Olufuko with the terminology and categories from an academic tradition. The emic perspective, on the other hand, is the point of view of the individual and culture and how they understand and experience different events. In this research, I try to balance both sides of emic and etic. I describe the ritual using theories and categories known from the study of ritual and I contrast this with the views of the informants.

3) Studying The Natural Settings Where Culture Manifests

According to Shimahara, “[t]he ethnographer attempts to understand holistically the cultural meanings of behaviour observed”.¹²¹ This can be done by paying

¹¹⁸ Shimahara 1995, 77.

¹¹⁹ Opas 2004, 158.

¹²⁰ Shimahara 1995, 81.

¹²¹ Shimahara 1995, 82.

attention to all aspects of the natural setting.¹²² In my case, I was to study the Olufuko Festival as a girls initiation ritual but also as a cultural festival. Therefore, I observed the behaviour of the girls, parents, ritual leaders, and festival visitors. In addition to this, I also noted the environment where the ritual events took place, that is, the Olufuko house and the festival area. This gave me a holistic view of the whole scene. Minna Opas points out the difficulty of the researcher's position. How can an outsider understand the worldview of the insiders?¹²³ Can a white woman from Finland truly understand the aspects of an Ovambo ritual? Or are the views of an Ovambo researcher really objective? According to Opas, an ethnographer is always as a person part of the research. The researcher constructs the knowledge by interacting with the subject. Ethnographical research aims to describe and explain the phenomena by interaction and participation.¹²⁴

According to sociologists Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, "fieldwork usually require[s] living with a group of people for extended periods".¹²⁵ The fieldwork period is the most important aspect of ethnography. During that time the researcher does most of the data collection, consisting of interviews, observations, and participation. The idea is that the researcher learns from the experience.¹²⁶ My intensive fieldwork period lasted a week. I stayed at the Olufuko Centre and lived among the girls who were to be initiated. The fieldwork started the day the initiates arrived and lasted until the last day when the girls left back home. The data was collected by observing, interviewing, and participating in the activities that happened during that week. Even though I was not able to blend in – mainly because of my skin colour people could see from miles away that I was not from the culture – during the week people got used to me. The mothers took me by the hand and wanted me to attend and participate in different activities.

Even though the intensive period lasted only a week, I have been in touch with the Northern Namibian culture before. My mother grew up in Northern Namibia and I was born in Botswana. My exchange period and my several trips to Namibia have also trained me to the northern Namibian culture. This means that I had some knowledge in advance of how to act and behave in a respectful manner

¹²² Shimahara 1995, 80–82; Borg, J. Gall and M. Gall 1996, 608.

¹²³ Opas 2004, 166–169.

¹²⁴ Opas 2004, 169, 176.

¹²⁵ Atkinson and Hammersley 2007, 1.

¹²⁶ Atkinson and Hammersley 2007, 1; Tolonen and Palmu 2007, 89.

which is very important in the Namibian context. Regardless the experience and the knowledge that I had, I still managed to make some cultural mistakes. For example, in the first days I only asked the initiates themselves permission to interview them. Later, I understood that it would be polite to first ask permission from the parents and then from the girls. Fortunately, the Namibians are very understanding and forgiving. It also helped that some of the local people knew my grandparents who were missionaries in Namibia in the 1960s. My grandparents endorsed the independence of Namibia and I noticed that because of that people remembered them with warmth. This opened up some doors and people were willing to talk to me because I was the granddaughter of Mikko Ihämäki.

3.2.1. Fieldwork

Ethnography is largely based on fieldwork and in some cases ethnography is seen identical to fieldwork.¹²⁷ A classical view of the field is that it is situated far away from home and the researcher must travel long distances and bumpy roads to get to the field.¹²⁸ Even though this was the case in my study, it does not necessarily mean that fieldwork has to be done in a different country and among a different society. It could be done near home as well. For example, researcher Anna Rastas has done her fieldwork in Finland interviewing children and youth about racism and Jussi Perälä did his doctoral thesis about underworld drug trade in Helsinki.¹²⁹ This shows that the ‘field’ can be understood in many ways. My field was situated in northern Namibia, near the Angolan border, in the town of Outapi in Omusati region.

As mentioned before, usually the fieldwork requires living with the informants for a designated time. I was on the field during the Olufuko Festival in 2016. Traditionally, ethnographical research entails an extended period in the field. In my case, I only stayed for a week with the girls, due to the nature of the Olufuko Festival. These girls came from different parts of Namibia without necessarily belonging to the same ethnic group or coming from the same region. After the Olufuko, the girls went back to their homes. It would have been interesting to continue observing the girls after they had returned. This would

¹²⁷ Hämeenaho and Koskinen-Koivisto 2014, 11.

¹²⁸ Atkinson and Hammersley 2007, 1.

¹²⁹ See Rastas 2007, *Rasismi lasten ja nuorten arjessa. Transnationaalit juuret ja monikulttuuristuva Suomi*; Perälä 2011, “*Miksi lehmät pitää tappaa?*” *Etnografinen tutkimus 2000-luvun alun huumemarkkinoista Helsingissä*.

require another study, where the focus would be on how the lives of the girls have changed after their initiation. How does Olufuko affect their lives? In this study, I concentrated on observing the different parts of the ritual and hearing the different views (especially the opinion of the girls) about Olufuko. Therefore, the actual fieldwork period lasted only for a week.

The Olufuko research team attended the Olufuko Festival in August 2016. My colleague Nena Shivute and I stayed with the initiates for the whole ritual week. This allowed us to interact with the initiates even when the gates were closed for the public. We could witness the early morning rituals and take care that none of the events went through without observation. The other team members arrived daily after ten in the morning when the actual public events started. The team consisted of six people, allowing us to ensure that all the events would be observed by at least one member of the team. The public performances were filmed so that the team could return to the events afterwards. These videos are held in UNAM's Multi Disciplinary Research Centre.

3.2.2. Interview

There are conflicting views on Olufuko. ELCIN and NamRights think it is a pagan practice, harmful to young girls, while Namibia's first president Sam Nujoma and some of the ministers of the government see Olufuko as a cultural practice of which Namibians should be proud. In addition to my interest in Olufuko as a ritual of passage, I was also interested in what the participating girls thought about Olufuko. Why did they want to attend this controversial rite? According to Colin Robson, the author of *Real World Research*: "When carrying out an enquiry involving humans, why not take advantage of the fact that they can tell you things about themselves?"¹³⁰ Following this idea, I wanted to go to the field and interview the initiates, to get them to explain their view on Olufuko for me. An interview is a unique way of getting information, in which the informants themselves give the information to the researcher. When it comes to collecting data in qualitative research, the primary method is interviewing the subject(s).¹³¹ There are advantages and disadvantages to this type of approach. The biggest benefit is probably the flexibility in data collection and also the fact that first-hand

¹³⁰ Robson 1994, 227.

¹³¹ Hirsijärvi, Remes and Sajavaara 1997, 200–201.

information is gained, straight from the subject himself/herself.¹³² The detriment is that I could not be sure if the informants were telling me their own opinions or were they telling me what they expected I wanted to hear.

One of the most beneficial things in interviewing is seeing a person as a subject and giving the subject a chance to speak for himself/herself. In a case where the topic is not widely known or there is only a restricted amount of data available, the interview should be considered as a data collecting method.¹³³ The Olufuko research team interviewed 35 girls, 25 parents of the initiates, five young women who have gone through the initiation in the previous years, 28 festival visitors, the two Namungangas, one of the three *Meekulus*, The Outapi Town Council, and the church representatives of the Anglican and the Lutheran churches. The initiates, parents, and the visitors were interviewed in a semi-structured way. Robson describes semi-structured interview as a mean that allows the interviewer to change or modify the questions as the interview goes on even though the interviewer has a set of questions in advance.¹³⁴ This means that we as interviewers had a questionnaire with several questions that we used it as a script that we modified as needed during the actual interviews.

I had to modify the questions very often because I noticed that the interviewees did not understand the questions as I meant them. The language barrier was one of the biggest problems in interviewing. I interviewed in English and this was problematic because it was not the mother tongue of the interviewer nor the interviewee. In some cases the respondents could not express themselves as wordily as they wanted and this lead easily to misunderstandings. Therefore I made some of the interviews with the help of our team members, Hiskia Akuupa and Nena Shivute. Hiskia translated the questions and answers to me. This was very helpful especially with the parents. Many of them did not speak English and therefore the translation was needed. Also my colleague Nena Shivute translated some of the interviews to me. For example, the Namungangas and the interview with Meekulu were done with her help. The problem in using a translator is that there is a risk that some of the points are not being translated. We discussed this issue and the translators kept this point in mind as they translated the interviews to me. It was also very important that some of the interviews were made in Oshiwambo. The respondents could answer in their mother tongue and their

¹³² Hirsijärvi and Hurme 2008, 35.

¹³³ Hirsijärvi and Hurme 2008, 35.

¹³⁴ Robson 1994, 230–231.

answers were more broad. These interviews were later transcribed and translated into English.

The other significant issue was that the respondents could have answered what they thought I wanted to hear. For example, when I asked the initiates if they have enjoyed their stay, everyone answered yes. I felt like even if someone had hated the Olufuko, they would have still answered that they have enjoyed it. Of course there were different ways in which they answered the question. Here are two examples; the first one is an initiate who was attending Olufuko in 2016 at the festival while the second one had gone through Olufuko in 2013.

Example 1

Saara: Okay. Have you enjoyed being here?

Initiate 20_SK: Yeah.

Saara: Okay.

Initiate 20_SK: We have enjoyed.

Saara: Had have fun?

Initiate 20_SK: Yeah.

Example 2

Saara: Okay. Did you enjoy?

Old initiate 1_SK: Yeah, I enjoyed a lot. Because I experienced a lot, I had fun, I met new people and I feel like I made my mom proud because this was always her wish for me like I should... yes. I'm going through... the right thing I wanted because my life now. I'm like guided 'cause I did exactly what I was told to do, how to behave and all that. And I think it's getting me somewhere and I have that respect and you know respect is something everyone has to have in order to achieve what you always wanted to achieve in life.

The respondent in the Example 2 is more talkative than in Example 1. The respondent in Example 2 explains why she enjoyed the Olufuko. The first example shows that the respondent answers only in a few words. This does not necessarily mean that she did not enjoy the Olufuko experience, it only shows that it is hard to tell what she really felt. The first example also shows that I had to be very careful not to lead the respondent's answers. In the questions I seem to have an opinion that she has had fun. My question should have been more neutral and not so leading.

The interviews with the church leaders were more on a thematic base. We let them openly explain their views on Olufuko. I conducted the interview sessions together with professor Hina MuAshekele. Nena Shivute assisted in the interview of the Anglican representative. These interviews lasted almost three hours and were very fruitful. We had some questions in advance but the interview session became a discussion about the topic and the respondents had a chance to openly talk about their views. After our fieldwork period at the Olufuko Festival my colleague Nena informed us that she is going to be initiated in December 2016. After her initiation Nena sent me a voice mail where she described the

Olufuko she went through. I got an opportunity to ask her questions and get a comparison of what her experience on Olufuko was.

3.3. Research Ethics

Olufuko is an incendiary topic and therefore it was important to treat the informants tactfully. The questionnaire was formed in a way that the respondents could stay anonymous. The majority of the initiates we interviewed were 16–17 years old. It was clear that I had to protect their identity and therefore there are no names mentioned. The Namungangas (ritual leaders) I identified in a way that their identity is not exposed. The representatives of the different churches and organisations are referred to with their full names because they publicly represent their associations.

One of the most important ethical principles in research is the informant's voluntary participation. It should be clear to the interviewee that his/her participation is done by their own free will. The individual should always have a choice not to participate in the research.¹³⁵ The Olufuko research team coordinator professor Hina MuAshekele informed the research team that we should always explain to the respondent what we are doing and should wear a UNAM tag so that people would recognise us. We should always ask permission to record the conversation and we should read the following to the potential respondent:

Confidentiality Clause of the Research.

The researchers and the university declare that it is the policy of the university to keep confidential, all information obtained from the research and to use such information only for research purposes. Names of all respondents will be kept confidential. All researchers on this project shall bear visibly clear identification mark/s of the university. The university carries out this project, impartially and objectively, on behalf of Outapi Town Council in collaboration with Olufuko Preparatory committee. The university therefore requests all respondents and the whole community of Omusati region to support the team during the period when they collect the fieldwork data for the project. The project coordinator is Prof. Hina MuAshekele.¹³⁶

Peter Steane in his article "Ethical Issues in Research" points out that the research participants should know that their attendance in the study will not harm them physically or psychologically.¹³⁷ Consequently, I informed the interviewees that their answers would stay anonymous and that their participation was not obligatory. At first, the girls were shy and they did not want to respond to the questions. I told them that it was okay and they did not have to answer if they did

¹³⁵ Seidman, 2013, 64, 67.

¹³⁶ Research Questionnaires: Omusati Region, August-September 2016.

¹³⁷ Steane 2004, 63.

not want to. I also highlighted the fact that it was acceptable if they felt that they did not want to respond to a particular question. By the end of the week, the girls were more confident and wanted to be interviewed. Some of them even came up to me and informed me that they were ready to answer my questions. All the interview data from the fieldwork period is held in UNAM's Multi Disciplinary Research Centre except my field notes which are in my custody.

3.4. Performance Theory

Rites of passage change a person from one status to another. Olufuko is a ritual of this type as it transforms girls into women. Performance theory sees this transition as a performance. The transition is performed and the transformation is permanent. Anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep (1873–1957) argues that rites of passage, or 'life-crisis rites' as he called them, follow a threefold structure: separation, transition, and incorporation (Van Gennep: *Les Rites de Passage*, 1909). According to Van Gennep, there are several rituals in human life which can be called rites of passage and they all have the same structure. For example death, marriage, and graduation belong to this category. Anthropologist Victor Turner took this a bit further. He concentrated on the concept of liminality, the middle stage in Van Gennep's threefold structure. Turner saw this stage as no-man's-land, where a person is in a stage between the 'structural past' and 'structural future'. It is a limbo where the person has not yet arrived at the destination.¹³⁸ The Olufuko ritual has three steps: 1) separation, where the girls are stripped of their old status, 2) liminal, where they are not girls anymore but not yet women, 3) they become women.

The nineteenth century Cambridge School scholars, such as James Frazer, saw the origins of theatre and especially Greek tragedy as evolving from rituals. Their view has been criticised for the lack of empirical evidence.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, Fiona Bowie indicates that ritual, theatre, games, dance, and music could all have similar features.¹⁴⁰ In other words, Olufuko ritual and theatre performance could have something in common. According to Bobby Alexander ritual is not 'just pretending' and acting the given script. Ritual affects the life of the initiate and

¹³⁸ Turner 1990, 11.

¹³⁹ Schechner 1988, 1; Bowie 2006, 145; Grimes 2006, 382.

¹⁴⁰ Bowie 2006, 145.

her close ones.¹⁴¹ The initiates in Olufuko pass into womanhood by ‘acting’ the role of a woman. Their mothers and aunts help them in this transformation. Ronald Grimes, on the other hand, points out that the word ‘performance’ has several connotations. Etymologically the word derives from Latin words *per* (through) and *forma* (form). One connotation of ‘performance’ is that it is acting in front of an audience. Another, is that it is a mechanism ‘to achieve’. Grimes discloses an example: “When a new employee asks about the performance indicators for a job, the question is about criteria for evaluation, not about playing dramatic roles.”¹⁴² The initiates in Olufuko practise the everyday chores of a woman. The Olufuko could be seen as a training camp where the girls are moulded into women.

Anthropologist Corinne Kratz has done ethnographical research among the Okiek of Kenya. She has divided the Okiek women’s initiation into two ritual sections. According to her, daytime events are more general and public, whereas the nocturnal section concentrates on the initiates.¹⁴³ In Olufuko, the events that were public and general happened outside the Olufuko house and usually at daytime (see Figure 3). The more intimate events, where the focus was on the girls, occurred inside the Olufuko house. Some events started very early in the morning before the gates were open to the public, for example, moulding the traditional stoves on the second day. Even though the public could observe all the events that happened during the Olufuko Festival opening hours (8–22), the events that took place inside the house were performed to a smaller audience partly because of the lack of space and the entrance fee.

Richard Schechner is known for his work in performance studies. As a theatre director, he brings a new perspective into ritual studies. According to him, whether a performance is to be classified as a rite or as theatre depends on its context and function. Ritual brings results (a girl’s transformation into a woman), while theatre is entertaining. Schechner adds that performance is never purely ritual or entertainment.¹⁴⁴ Based on this observation, I argue that in the Olufuko Festival the performance is both ritual and theatre. Performance theory opens up the Olufuko ritual in an interesting way. The ritual is performed to an audience and the Outapi Town Council wants Olufuko to be a drawcard of the town. This

¹⁴¹ Alexander, 1997, 154.

¹⁴² Grimes 2006, 381.

¹⁴³ Kratz 1994, 136.

¹⁴⁴ Schechner 1988, 120.

affects the ritual which has become a performance in a new way: it is a performance of the girls' initiation ritual, which transforms the girls into women, but at the same time it is an entertaining event for tourists and bypassers of the town. Traditionally Olufuko was an intimate rite that was not observed by outsiders. This means that the Olufuko ritual that was conducted in the festival in 2016 has been modified to serve the needs and interests of the different contemporary participants.

In different kinds of performances Schechner separates transformation from transportation. Rites of passage are in the category of transformation. For example, they transform a girl into a woman, a fiancée into a wife, or a dead person into an ancestor. Transportation, on the other hand, can be seen as transforming into a new role for a while but eventually coming back to the original self. For example, actors transport into a new role, but eventually, they come back to themselves, that is, the change is not permanent.¹⁴⁵ In the next chapters, I analyse the Olufuko ritual in the light of performance theory.

¹⁴⁵ Schechner 1985, 117–150.

4. Olufuko Festival 2016 – Ritual and Festival

There were two components balancing at the Olufuko Festival 2016: the traditional ritual and the contemporary festival. In these next chapters, I shortly describe the ritual and the festival separately, then look at the ritual as an initiation ritual, and, after, analyse the ritual and the festival in the light of performance theory.

4.1. Olufuko Ritual

4.1.1. The Setting

The Olufuko Festival has been organised annually since 2012 in Northern Namibia in the town of Outapi. The idea was born around 2003–2004, when the members of the Outapi Town Council were thinking of ways to lift the visibility and attractiveness of the town. They saw that tourists were driving through Outapi to the Ruacana and Epupa falls. This brought up the question of how to get the tourists and investors to stay in town longer. Other towns had their trade fares, but Outapi wanted something different. They had a meeting with the stakeholders and the idea of Olufuko Festival was born. At first, they thought of having a demonstration of how Olufuko used to be done. The ritual experts they consulted stated that the ritual could not be demonstrated – it could only be practised. This led to today's Olufuko Festival in which the initiation ritual is performed.¹⁴⁶ The situation resembles Richard Schechner's description of the Makehuku village in Papua New Guinea and their 'mudmen' performance. According to Schechner, traditionally the villagers used to perform this 'mudmen' dance when they felt threatened, but by the 1980s the dance had turned into a performance for the tourists. The performance made for the tourists has no longer the vibe of the threat in it.¹⁴⁷ Olufuko, on the other hand, still is a girls' initiation rite even though it has also become a tourist attraction.

The Olufuko Festival area is a designated space that the Outapi Town Council reserves for the festival. It has a fence surrounding the area and guards at the main entrance. Inside the Olufuko Centre there is the Olufuko house, food and shop tents, exhibitors, and a performance stage for the music events in the evenings. According to the town council, they wanted to bring four attributes into

¹⁴⁶ Interview with the Outapi Town Council, 30.8.2016.

¹⁴⁷ Schechner 1988, 125–138.

the festival: 1) the girls' initiation, 2) arts and crafts, 3) agriculture, and 4) commercial side.¹⁴⁸ The Olufuko house itself is a traditional homestead built according to *Oshimbandja* tradition. All the actions of the ritual take place either inside the house or in its close proximity. The parts of the ritual that are performed outside the house can be observed from a small distance. To enter the house, one has to pay 100 Namibian dollars (around 8 €).

Tradition and commercialism were combined at the Olufuko Festival 2016. The girls represented the tradition with their outfit, behaviour, and by going through their initiation. At the same time, the shops and evening entertainment were commercial in nature. In the evenings, outside the Olufuko house, but within the festival area, people consumed alcohol and enjoyed music performances that were going on the stage. Nevertheless, the girls were not allowed to go outside the Olufuko house in the evenings. This was because the organisers wanted to protect the girls from harassment and accidents, and also because the evenings were supposed to be a moment of isolation. Music played in the evenings was modern dance music that could be heard in nightclubs and bars. Even though this was a festival of the girls, they had to stay inside the Olufuko house and watch the evening performances through the fence and they were not able to participate with the festival visitors. The Olufuko house is built in the traditional *Oshimbandja* style, more specifically in the *kraal* fashion. There are different sections inside the house. Inside, next to the main entrance, is the *oshini*, which was the *mahangu* grain pounding area. Other relevant rooms in a *kraal* house are the *ondjugo* and the *etala*. The *ondjugo* was traditionally the first wife's bedroom and it has a big role in the Olufuko ritual as it symbolises womanhood. The most intimate events happen in the *ondjugo*. The *etala*, on the other, hand is a place for gathering and relaxation. Before every ritual event, the girls gathered in the *etala* and there they were told what was going to happen. Traditionally, the *etala* used to be the 'living room' of the house. Another significant place is the *etambo*, in front of the house with sitting logs for the initiates to sit on. The events that had the biggest audience happened at the *etambo* so that viewers could observe the ritual without paying the entrance fee to the house.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with the Outapi Town Council, 30.8.2016.

4.1.2. Actors and Audience

The Olufuko ritual traditionally consists of different roles. Besides the initiates, there are the ritual conductors and small boys and girls with their specific tasks. In addition to this, at the Olufuko Festival, there were also the crowd, to whom the ceremony was performed, the politicians who supported the ritual, and the members of the media who reported it.

The initiates are called *ovafuko* (*omufuko* in the singular). It translates into English as ‘bride’ or ‘young woman’. Erastus Kautondokwa translates it as ‘marriageable women’ in his thesis.¹⁴⁹ In 2016, there were 86 girls attending the initiation.¹⁵⁰ The girls were 15 to 24 years old and came from different backgrounds. They were dressed according to their traditions, some modestly dressed and some with plenty of accessories on them. Traditionally, the initiates were not allowed to speak to anybody, but such strictness is not applied these days. According to Namunganga Maria: “The process [Olufuko ritual] is identical but the conditions are completely different.”

There were two Namungangas and three Meekulus conducting the ritual. Namunganga refers to a ritual leader, also known as *Omupitifi*.¹⁵¹ Meekulu is a respective term for an elderly woman. Namungangas were the ritual leaders and Meekulus were the assistants that took care of the girls, organising practical things, for example, lining up the girls and getting them ready for the events. Namungangas were older than the Meekulus. Audrey Richards notes that among the Bemba these kinds of ritual leaders are usually elderly women with a respected status in their society.¹⁵² This was also the situation in Olufuko, where one Meekulu was the wife of the chief of Ombalantu.

The *Oufukwena*¹⁵³ were small girls from the age of 6 to 8. They were the assistants of the initiates. Each initiate had two oufukwena helping her and they followed the initiate everywhere, carrying baskets or other small items for the initiate. Some people had misunderstood the role of these oufukwena. As I talked to people at the festival area, I noticed that some of them thought that the oufukwena were also initiated. Because of this misconception it should be emphasise that these small girls were not initiated.

¹⁴⁹ Kautondokwa 2014, 22.

¹⁵⁰ The number was provided by the Outapi Town Council.

¹⁵¹ Kautondokwa 2014, 27.

¹⁵² Richards 1982, 57.

¹⁵³ *Okafukwena* singular and *oufukwena* plural.

The *Eembuhiki* were small boys, 7 to 10 years old. Their role was to be representatives of the future husband. They were also called as placeholders of the fiancé. They accompanied the initiates, as their future husbands would do. The boys acted as husbands when they were served food at etambo. They commented on the food the initiates served them and expressed whether they were satisfied or not.

The initiates arrived at the Olufuko Festival with their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers. Some fathers had also arrived with their daughters, but remained a minority. Most of the people who stayed at the Olufuko house were women from different age groups. The women ululated and danced throughout the whole week and participated in some parts of the ritual.

The audience of the ritual consisted of different people. There were vendors, residents from the area, bypassers, and tourists. Some of the people had heard about Olufuko before and some of them did not know anything about it. An American interviewee did not know what Olufuko was and his guess was that:

I know that it's one of the tribal festivals. So I know we have them in Zambezi where each of the tribes have their annual festival. At least it sounds like this but I'm not sure.¹⁵⁴

People did not have a clear picture what was Olufuko all about. They were curious to see what it was. Some of the visitors came there purely for the festivity.

4.1.3. The Events of Olufuko

The first day of the ritual is called *Ekoho*. Directly translated Ekoho stands for 'the Wash'.¹⁵⁵ On this day, the girls arrived with their relatives to the Olufuko Centre. They did not arrive all at the same time, but in their own small groups along the day. Some of the families had to travel a long way to get to the Olufuko Centre. a few girls came from Windhoek, for example.¹⁵⁶

According to Namunganga Maria, Ekoho signifies the day on which the girls come and set up for Olufuko. The relatives start making the traditional brew (*omalovu*) and set up pots and a fire for cooking. The fire used for cooking during the initiation week is taken from *Oshoto*¹⁵⁷ where the holy fire burns for the whole week. It was explained to me that the fire unifies the different families in the

¹⁵⁴ Interview, Visitor 6_SK 27.8.2016.

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Namunganga Maria 29.8.2016.

¹⁵⁶ Windhoek is the capital city of Namibia. The distance from the capital to Outapi is 800 km.

¹⁵⁷ Traditionally *Oshoto* is the gathering place of the house. The head of the family receives visitors in this place. There is always a fire burning.

house. When everybody takes the fire from the same source, it joins the families together. During the initiation, the initiates do not work or cook. Everything is done for them.

In the evening of the first day, the girls lined up and went to greet the chief of Ombalantu, Oswin Mukulu, who arrived at the Olufuko Centre with his family and tribe members. He arrived driving slowly with his car while his tribe members followed: first his wife and daughters and then other members. The arrival of the chief marked the beginning of Olufuko. The girls stood in line and went behind the chief's tribe, creating a long queue. When the girls were in the queue, it was prohibited to cut the line. This applied every time the girls were lined up, they had to be linked to each other and nothing could come between them.

The second day is called *Omakunde*, translating to 'The Day of the Beans'. It comes from the fact that on the same day the paternal family cooks dry bean soup. The day started very early. It was three in the morning when the girls were woken up and taken to the toilet. Traditionally the initiates were not allowed to do their businesses in bright daylight when everyone could see them. Nowadays it is allowed and the morning activity stays as a remainder of how it used to be.¹⁵⁸

At six o'clock in the morning some of the mothers, grandmothers, and aunts of the girls were getting ready to mould the traditional stoves. The relatives moulded different kinds of objects, such as human figures of different sexes and cattle. These figures signify the hopes and wishes families have for their children. The human figures signify the future baby and its sex, while the cattle figures signify wealth. After this, the relatives moulded cooking stoves.¹⁵⁹ The stoves are made for the girls so that the girl and her future family would not suffer hunger.

Around eight o'clock in the morning, the girls gathered to etala, the relaxation hut of the traditional homestead. There the girls stood in a ring with their Oufukwena. The relatives were dancing, waving horsetail whisks, ululating and singing. After a while, the girls were taken outside, in front of the homestead (etambo), where the Eembuhiki served the girls *oshihupaela*, which is a part of the traditional beer, omalovu. The drink was served from a traditional calabash holder and drunk from a wooden cup. All the cups must be brand new and never used before.

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Namunganga Maria 29.8.2016.

¹⁵⁹ Traditionally the stoves are made of clay. There are three round pieces that make the stove.

After the initiates had drank their oshihupaela, they were taken back inside the Olufuko house. There they were taken to the ondjugo four or five girls at a time. The space was small and there were a lot of people around, therefore the girls were taken inside in small groups. The second day is also known as the day of the father. This means that the girls pounded the mahangu grain,¹⁶⁰ which they had received from their paternal side of the family. In the ondjugo, the girl's paternal aunt or grandmother applied a red-ochre oil on her. The initiates sat on the ground straight-legged and straight-backed. This was the only way that the girls were allowed to sit. After they were coated with the oil, they received their paternal mahangu grains in a basket. This grain was brought to them from their paternal side of the family. The girls carried these baskets on top of their heads and took them to the oshini pounding area. There the girls pound the grains in the traditional way. If the paternal family had brought cattle for the festivity, they would have been slaughtered on this day. In the Olufuko Festival 2016, the Outapi Town Council provided cattle for slaughter every day. The meat was distributed to the families of the initiates. The Town Council also provided other commodities, such as flour, oil, and salt. This way, the Town Council wanted to make sure that everyone could afford the celebrations.

Around five o'clock in the afternoon, the girls went to queue in front of the Olufuko house. They sat in front of the homestead the same way they did in the morning. This time they had arrived with pots of food. They had mahangu porridge (*oshithima*), chicken, and spinach which they served to the Eembuhiki. The girls were not allowed to eat. This symbolises the way marriage life would be in the future. Traditionally, a woman never eats with her husband and children. The woman eats in the kitchen (*omasiga*) before she serves food to the rest of the family.

The third day is called *Okambandjona* ('small jackal'). The girls were woken up at five o'clock in the morning and the same morning routine was done as the previous day. This day also happened to be Heroes Day, a national public holiday. It was estimated that there would be many more visitors on this day than on the day before.

¹⁶⁰ Mahangu, also known as pearl millet, is an important ingredient of Namibian food. Mahangu porridge and the traditional beer, omalovu are made from mahangu flour.

On the third day, the initiates did the same tasks as on the previous day. The only exception was that the mahangu grain was from the maternal side of the family. This is how the girls become connected to their paternal and maternal families. If the maternal family had brought cattle, then that would have been slaughtered on this day.¹⁶¹

Around mid-day, the girls served lunch to the Eembuhiki. Again, the girls did not eat, they only watched as the little boys and girls were eating. This also happened in the evening. The mothers, aunts, and grandmothers were dancing and ululating the whole day. It was interesting to see how the women from different tribes were all dancing together. Especially the Himbas, who do not normally share the Ovambo culture and have their own traditions, were dancing and participating as well. According to the members of the Town Council, they wanted to provide a cultural festival where everyone is welcome to attend – not only the Ovambo.¹⁶²

On the afternoon of the third day, there was a camera group from the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation preparing the etala for a live broadcast that was aired that same evening. There was a discussion panel broadcast from inside the house. The etala became a restricted area and people were not allowed to enter or take pictures. The initiates were with their relatives in the other rooms of the house. Singing and ululating could be heard all around the area, but silence was requested in the etala during the broadcast.¹⁶³

The fourth day is called the day of Efundula. It is also known as the day of Olufuko. This is the most important day of the ritual, when the initiates go to the ondjuo through the legs of the Namunganga. According to one of the initiators, Namunganga Ekotolo:

A girl can only be initiated if they pass between my [initiator's] legs. It must be an older person and not a young one. Only after the completion of this ritual a girl is considered to be initiated.¹⁶⁴

The day started at four o'clock in the morning in the same way as on the previous days. This day was the opening day of the festival even though the festival had been ongoing for days. The opening ceremonies included speeches and dance performances, starting around ten in the morning and lasting for two or

¹⁶¹ Field notes 26.8.2016; interview with Namunganga Maria 29.8.2016.

¹⁶² Field notes 26.8.2016.

¹⁶³ Field notes 26.8.2016.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Namunganga Ekotolo 27.8.2016.

three hours. There were tents where people were sitting and watching the ceremony and the opening speeches. One tent was reserved for VIP guests.¹⁶⁵

The ritual itself started around five in the afternoon, when the sun was setting. The different events of Olufuko were done either in the morning or in the afternoon, but seldom at noon when it was the hottest time of the day. Traditionally, it is believed that the cool weather symbolises calmness in the ceremony.¹⁶⁶ The girls lined up and went around the house holding onto the hips of each other with their heads down. They started from the ondjugo and went outside the Olufuko house from the main entrance. Then they continued going to the right alongside the fence of the Olufuko house until they got around the homestead to the cattle kraal. They went through the kraal, back to the ondjugo. Traditionally the man of the house takes care of the cattle and the kraal. It's one of those areas where women are not allowed. I was told that after the initiation and by going through the kraal, the girls could go anywhere in their future house. believed traditional belief was that if a girl has not gone through this phase and she goes to the kraal in her house, the cattle could die.¹⁶⁷

The girls enter the ondjugo through the legs of the Namunganga. At the festival, they entered in groups of ten, because the ondjugo was a small space. I was inside, observing the girls as they arrived. They stood up quietly and some were afraid to open their eyes. There had been rumours that inside the ondjugo, a man would be waiting for them to test their virginity by doing some sexual acts to them. Many of the girls expected to see such a man:

Initiate 23_SK: [...] And when you are going in the ondjugo whereby you pass through the legs of namuganga. Yeah, people told us that you'll find a man there but actually we did not find a man there.

One visitor had come to the Olufuko Festival, because she also had heard rumours about the initiation:

Initiate 1_EK: We heard that the initiator stands at the entrance of the main hut with his legs apart for the initiates to pass between his legs. We also hear that the initiates stay in the main hut with a naked male initiator.

Because of such rumours, it should be emphasised that there was not a man in the ondjugo. The Namungangas emphasised that men have never been a part of this ritual.¹⁶⁸ Going between the legs of the Namunganga to the ondjugo, the woman's room in the house, is like going into the womb of womanhood. Before the girls

¹⁶⁵ Field notes 27.8.2016.

¹⁶⁶ Interview with meme Mukulu 24.8.2016.

¹⁶⁷ Field notes 27.8.2016; interview with the Olufuko Festival organisers 17.5.2016.

¹⁶⁸ Field notes 27.8.2016; interview with the Olufuko Festival organisers 17.5.2016; interview with Namunganga Maria 29.8.2016.

crawl out from the ondjugo, the Namunganga puts a basket in front of the entrance. The parents then give gifts to the initiator. According to Namunganga Ekotolo:

The baskets are a gift for the initiator. The baskets are always filled with something. In the past, parents would put a little bit of *omahangu* yellow flour, or anything such as omahangu grains, clay pot. However nowadays people are using money as gifts than other items as money is easier to get than other traditional items. The parents are ululating because they are both excited and content that is brought by their daughter's achievement, the initiation.¹⁶⁹

After this the girls crawl out from the ondjugo where their relatives, Namungangas, and Meekulus receive them with joy. The day ends to this celebration.

The fifth day is called *Ondjimbulula nekotolo*, also known as *Ekotolo*. On this day, the girls were not waken up as early as they were on the previous days. Around mid-day, the girls were seated under the shade of the grain storage facilities approximately ten girls at the time. The Namunganga marked the foreheads of the girls' with mahangu flour and ostrich shell beads. Then the Namunganga marked an X to the girls' back and chest with the same flour. According to Erastus Kautondokwa "[t]he lines represent the baby carrier straps where the babies will be carried".¹⁷⁰ After this, the girls were given a cup of omalovu, which included some herbs and mahangu flour. After the girl had sipped this drink, the rest of it was poured to the girl's belly and back. The girls were given a big salt brick, symbolizing a baby. The Namunganga put the salt brick under the girl's belt and it came out through the legs of the girl. This represented pregnancy and giving birth. After this, the girl stood up and brushed the place. Namunganga Ekotolo explains it as follows:

I take the wooden drinking cup, containing traditional beer, and pour it on the initiate's abdomen and lower back. I then shout 'get up get up before the baby wees on you!' She then takes a broom and then she sweeps away her baby's wee. A girl can never complete her initiation without going through this process. Ekotolo is a ritual that is intended to bring good fortune for childbearing to the initiate. A few herbs that I take from the calabash are also put in the beer that the initiate has to drink. The herb is known as the *Osheetaludalo*, an herb that brings about childbirth.¹⁷¹

After this the girl had to cradle the salt brick as if it was a child. The Namunganga and the girl had a short dialogue:

Namunganga: Did you give birth to a child?
Initiate: Yes.
Namunganga: Is it a boy or a girl?

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Namunganga Ekotolo 27.8.2016.

¹⁷⁰ Kautondokwa 2014, 45.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Namunganga Ekotolo 27.8.2016.

Initiate: A girl/a boy (depending on what she wants)
Namunganga: What is his/her name?
Initiate: (The girl gives a name for the baby).¹⁷²

This performance was about the girl acting as a mother. It resembles the different steps of becoming a mother: pregnancy, childbirth, and ending with her naming her newly born baby. As Namunganga Ekotolo said, this phase of the ritual is to make the bearing of the child easier. In the future, when the girl is giving birth to her first child, she already knows the steps, because she has acted them in Olufuko. The meaning of Olufuko is to prepare the girl for the future as a woman, even though the real situations will be much tougher.

The time was around five in the afternoon, when the girls gathered again to the etala. It was time to jump over the fire. The girls lined up and prepared to go outside the Olufuko house to the etambo. There the Namunganga had prepared a small fire. The fire was taken from the oshoto, where the holy fire was burning. The jumping following its own phases: The mother/aunt/grandmother of the girl chased the girl with a twig. The girl had to jump over the fire, her relative behind her. Then the girl ran to the Namunganga, who was holding a long stick. The girl had to knock the stick down and then take the twig from her relative. Then it was the girl's turn to chase the relative with the twig. I was told that jumping over the fire is like jumping into adulthood. An adult has to go through 'hot situations' in life and this is what the fire represents. The mother whipped the girl with the twig, because she was basically asking "why are you imitating me?", while the girl whipping back is like saying: "Why are you whipping me? You are the one who showed me."¹⁷³ After this event, the twigs were burned in the fire and then the fire was put down. According to Kautondokwa, "[a]fter jumping the fire, the twigs (lashes) that were used to beat each other have to be burned up in the fire that was jumped as an indication of the end of childhood guidance and total forgiveness and compassion between the mothers and the girls."¹⁷⁴

Almost immediately after the jumping over the fire -episode, another event started outside the Olufuko house at the etambo. The girls with their mothers started to plough and sow seeds. They had to do it quickly before it was going to rain. No rain was expected, but this was to represent the woman's task in the house. Taking care of the mahangu field has traditionally been a woman's job and she has to sow the seeds before the rainy season begins. After sowing the seeds,

¹⁷² Field notes 28.8.2016.

¹⁷³ Nena additional interview 20.2.2017.

¹⁷⁴ Kautondokwa 2014, 44.

the girls had to go pick up firewood and this was also done quickly before the rain. While they were picking the invisible firewood, one of the Namungangas shouted that it was starting to rain. Then the girls had to run quickly back into the Olufuko house and this was the end of the performances on the fifth day.

The sixth day is called *Okandjimbululwena*, the Day of the Farewell. The day did not start as early as it had in the beginning of Olufuko. On this day, those girls with hairdressings had them removed. I was told that the removing signified the ending of Olufuko. It was done bit by bit to signify that a girl has gone through Olufuko and was now slowly emerging as a woman. During the Olufuko, the maternal and paternal families of the girl had added daily red ochre oil to the initiate's skin. This oil was not washed out until this last day. The girls were carefully wiped clean and according to Namunganga Maria, what they were actually wiping off was the dust of the Olufuko.¹⁷⁵ After the girls had been wiped clean from the oil, they had to start getting ready to go back home. They could not sleep in the same place where they used to sleep during the Olufuko. Namunganga Maria explained that they have been wiped clean of that place too.¹⁷⁶ The girls' journey back home got delayed because they had to wait for Namibia's first president Sam Nujoma to send them home. The president came late in the afternoon to greet the girls and the audience.

4.2. Olufuko Festival 2016 – The Festivity

The Olufuko Festival was not just a girls' initiation festivity, it was also a cultural festival. There were different things and performances going on inside the festival area but outside the Olufuko house. In the next chapters, I present the various features of the festival that were not part of the actual initiation.

4.2.1. Vendors and Exhibitors

In the festival area, there were several green tents set up for vendors. These vendors could be divided into two groups: food and goods. The food vendors sold beverages and portions of food, mostly *kapana*.¹⁷⁷ The goods vendors sold different items from traditional clothes to Bibles and toys. The vendors were local

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Namunganga Maria 29.8.2016.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Namunganga Maria 29.8.2016.

¹⁷⁷ Kapana is a portion of grilled beef.

people and their businesses were small. There were also tailors who sold traditional Ovambo clothing such as belts, skirts, and shirts. The clothes had black and pink stripes, which are the traditional colours of the Ovambo.

One of the main ideas of Olufuko Festival was to make it into a cultural festival as well. Therefore, the Outapi Town Council had hired exhibitors to present traditional agricultural objects and crafts. These exhibitors showed, for example, the weaving of baskets, the moulding of clay pots, and hand-carving wooden cups for the traditional brew, *sorghum* beer. These presenters had the opportunity to sell their wares as well. It was interesting to notice that there were also exhibitors of health care. In one tent there was a stand where sexual education was presented. There was also a mobile HIV/AIDS test clinic. This element was interesting because ELCIN and the Namibian human rights organisation NamRights strongly opposes Olufuko and have accused Olufuko of spreading HIV and AIDS.¹⁷⁸ According to ELCIN and NamRights, Olufuko is a notorious sexual initiation which “encourages the youth to practice promiscuities”¹⁷⁹ and supports child marriages.¹⁸⁰ In chapter 5.1, I discuss ELCIN’s stance and its arguments against Olufuko further.

4.2.2 Performers

At the Olufuko Centre, there was a stage where music was performed in the evenings. Every night, the evening entertainment started around seven or eight and lasted until the early morning hours. There were also dance competitions on the stage. The initiates were not permitted to participate in the evening activities. It was not clear to me whether the performers got paid or worked free of charge.

The Opening Ceremony was on Saturday 27th of August 2016. It started and ended with the African Union anthem and the Namibian national anthem, lasting for three hours. During the ceremony, different traditional authorities were singing and dancing. The importance of upholding culture and tradition was highlighted in several speeches. The Urban and Rural Development Minister, Sophia Shangwa and the Major of Outapi, Selma Nelago Asino were among others who gave a speech at the event. Three big tents provided shade for the listeners. The initiates

¹⁷⁸ ELCIN Pastoral Letter for Press Release, 19.6.2012.

¹⁷⁹ ELCIN Pastoral Letter for Press Release, 19.6.2012.

¹⁸⁰ Nangoloh 2014, 2.

were sitting in the front row of one of the tents that were full of observers of the opening ceremony.

4.2.3 Material

The Olufuko Festival distributes an Olufuko Magazine. It has been published four times. The first issue was released in 2013, a year after the launch of Olufuko Festival and since then the magazine has been published every year. In 2016, it was the first time that an Olufuko spokesperson was chosen for the cover, namely that of Maria Nepembe. She is a Namibian reality-television celebrity known from shows such as Big Brother Africa – The Chase. She came to public knowledge in 2012 at 24 years of age, when she made it to the top five on the Miss Namibia competition. Since then, she has appeared as a host both on radio and television. It is interesting that Maria Nepembe herself has never gone through the initiation, but still, she represents the ritual and encourages girls to go through it.¹⁸¹

The Olufuko Magazine is full of different advertisements from local entrepreneurs. In the Olufuko Magazine Vol. 4 Issue July 2016–June 2017, there were 43 different advertisements in total. Six of them were from building and construction companies. Hotels, investors, and trade centres each had five advertisements. Fashion and beauty salons had four adverts as did food and catering companies.¹⁸² It was interesting to notice that most of the adverts were from building and construction companies. In Outapi there were several construction sites in 2016. The town had built a new shopping centre in the middle of Outapi and the office of the Town Council had moved to a new building. The town was clearly raising its profile by repairing its old buildings. This means good business for the building and contraction companies. The adverts of the hotels and guesthouses were dedicated to the visitors of the Olufuko Festival who stay in Outapi for one or more nights.

The Olufuko Festival also published a DVD in 2015. The film is 17 minutes long and it presents Olufuko Festival as a cultural festivity. It is mainly shot on the opening day in 2015, showing bits and pieces of the opening ceremony. The film presents the different attributes of the festival: the girls' initiation, arts and

¹⁸¹ Haushona-Kavamba (The Confidante) 14.4.2016; "Maria Nepembe – The Beautiful face of Olufuko" in Olufuko Magazine Vol. 4 Issue July 2016–June 2017, p 8.

¹⁸² See *Figure 2*.

crafts, agriculture, and the commercial side. The film only shows short glimpses of the girls' initiation.

Figure 1

Advert Group	Adverts	Advert Group	Adverts
Building & Construction	6	Food & Catering	4
Hotels & Guesthouses	5	Vehicle	3
Investors	5	Printing & Audio Visual	3
Trade Centres & Malls	5	Medical Services	2
Fashion & Beauty Salons	4	Other (animal food, private primary school, logistics, A.C., urinal units, Tsandi)	6

4.3 Olufuko – *Betwixt and Between*

The Olufuko ritual, as other initiation rituals, had three phases: preliminal, liminal, and postliminal. According to Victor Turner, in an initiation ritual the initiates are egalitarian. When they step into the liminal phase they also step into a communal phase. They are stripped down from their old status and they step betwixt of girlhood and womanhood.¹⁸³ Richard Schechner describes Turner's idea of the liminal step as a phase where the initiates are freed from the demands of daily life and the personal and social differences of the initiate are set aside.¹⁸⁴

On the first day of Olufuko, the girls were stripped from their old status and they were dressed in traditional clothes. Their skin was covered with red ochre oil. They possessed nothing and they were expected to be passive and humble. Turner's argument on the initiates being egalitarian does not quite fit into Olufuko. Every time the initiates lined up, they had a specific order. The first girl in the queue was the daughter of the chief of Ombalantu. Being first in line upholds her social status. Another thing that speaks against the egalitarianism is the girls' way of dressing, as they were dressed according to their tradition, further showing difference between the girls. They brought the status of their ethnic background with them to the ritual and a girl could be identified from her clothing, going against Turner's idea.

At the Olufuko Festival 2016, after the initiates were stripped from their social status and dressed according to their tradition, the girls stepped into the liminal phase. According to Turner at this point "the initiates tend to develop a tense comradeship".¹⁸⁵ Although the initiates dressed differently and the hierarchical status could be noticed, the girls shared the experience together. The initiates attended the events together and they had the same tasks. This could be seen as 'spontaneous communitas', which, according to Turner, occurs when a group of people share the same emotional event.¹⁸⁶ In Olufuko, the initiates shared their initiation into womanhood and the experience brought them together. It should be pointed out that especially as the girls came from different backgrounds, their experiences of the Olufuko could differ. Even though they attended the same ritual and the same events, this does not necessarily mean that they felt the same way. It could have been that someone enjoyed the practise

¹⁸³ Turner 1969, 95.

¹⁸⁴ Schechner 2013, 70.

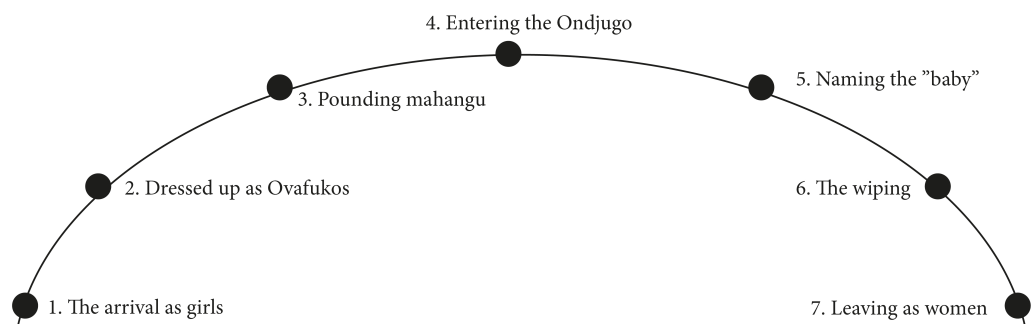
¹⁸⁵ Turner 1969, 95.

¹⁸⁶ Turner 1982, 47–48.

while some did not. During the liminal phase of the ritual the girls were “trained” to be women. The tasks they did were tasks that are traditionally made by women.¹⁸⁷ During this time the initiates were transformed into adults.

The transition to the postliminal phase started on the fourth day after the initiates had entered the ondjugo through the legs of the Namunganga. The crawling into the ondjugo signifies the starting point of womanhood. According to Namunganga Ekotolo, this event was the most important event of the ritual. Without this phase a girl could not be initiated.¹⁸⁸ In the liminal phase the initiates were open to transformation, blank slates in a sense, but after the fourth day the outline of womanhood was drawn onto them. The outline became stronger on the fifth day when the initiates cradled the salt bricks like babies.¹⁸⁹ On the sixth day, the dust of Olufuko was wiped off the initiates’ skin.¹⁹⁰

Figure 2



The whole structure of the ritual prepared the initiates to become women. I have illustrated the ritual structure in figure 2. The first step is when the initiates arrive as girls to the Olufuko house. This marks the separation of the girls and also the beginning of the ritual. The second step is when the girls are dressed in their traditional clothes. It is the uniform that unites the individuals to their clan but at the same time separates the clans from each other. At this point the girls are stepping into the liminal phase. I have named the third step as ‘pounding mahangu’. The initiates are learning the women’s duties (such as pounding

¹⁸⁷ Examples of women’s traditional tasks carried out during the ritual: pounding mahangu, serving food to the Eembuhiki, cradling the “baby”, picking up firewood and taking care of the mahangu field. (The detailed descriptions for the events see chapter 4.1.3.)

¹⁸⁸ Namunganga Ekotolo 27.8.2016; Field notes 27.8.2016.

¹⁸⁹ Field notes 28.8.2016.

¹⁹⁰ Field notes 29.8.2016.

mahangu and feeding the husband). The fourth step is entering the ondjugo. At this point, the girls have learned how to be adult women. After the ondjugo, the girls start to learn the duties of a mother and the fifth step is the concrete practise of motherhood. The initiates act out childbirth, they name their newborn and cradle him/her. The sixth step, marks the beginning of the postliminal phase. The girls are wiped from the ochre oil on their skin as well as from the role of ovafuko.¹⁹¹ The seventh and final step is when the initiates transform into women and leave the Olufuko house. They go back to their societies but now as women and not girls anymore.

4.4 Olufuko Festival 2016 in the Eyes of Performance Theory

Performance can be divided into two separate groups – transportation or transformation – depending on the performance's ending. According to Richard Schechner, people usually call transportation performances theatre. Initiation rituals such as Olufuko, on the other hand, are seen as transformative. They transform a person from one social status to another and the transformation is permanent. But Schechner argues that the separation between transportation and transformation in rituals does not hold up and that, in fact, the two kinds of performance coexist in the same event.¹⁹² Based on my findings on Olufuko, I agree with this view. It is true that the Olufuko ritual transformed the girls into women and that after the initiation there was no turning back to being a girl. But if we take a look into the other ritual actors it is clear that the ritual transports the co-performers and their role is not changed permanently.

The initiates had the main role in Olufuko as the ritual is all about transforming the girls into women and teaching them how to be respectful adults. The girls go through different phases and the ritual ends at the point where the dust of girlhood is wiped off their skin. The girls were participants in almost every event with the exception of moulding the traditional stoves, which the girls did not attend.

Not all the ritual actors were transformed. The transported actors in the ritual were the two Namugangas, the Meekulus, the Eembuhiki, and the Oufukwena. Each one of them had a specific role in the ritual. According to

¹⁹¹ Interview with Namunganga Maria 29.8.2016.

¹⁹² Schechner 1985, 130.

Schechner, “[w]hen the performance is over the transported have been returned to their place of entry and the transformed have been changed.”¹⁹³ The Namungangas were the spiritual agents of the ritual, elderly women who had the knowledge to conduct the ritual. These Namungangas were taught to be Namungangas and took care that the girls were initiated properly. The Namungangas had been initiated and had been transformed earlier in life into women. The Meekulus were also initiated when they were young. The Meekulus took care of the girls and they were the teachers, guides, and mentors of the initiates. The Meekulus and the Namungangas were transported actors in the ritual but also, they were the transport agents of the initiates. If the initiation ritual is a journey from one shore to another, then the Meekulus and the Namungangas were the boat that transports the initiates. The Meekulus and the Namungangas conveyed the initiates into womanhood and the initiates transformed into women.

The other transported actors were the Eembuhiki and the Oufukwena. The Eembuhiki were the placeholders of the future husband. During the ritual, these boys acted as husbands by remarking the food they ate and by walking along with the initiates. The Oufukwena were servants for the initiates, carrying baskets and small items for the initiates. After Olufuko, both the Eembuhiki and the Oufukwena were transported back into their normal role as children.

The parents and the audience were not transported nor transformed. They attended the ritual in their normal role as parents or festival visitors. The parents were celebrating and the visitors came to see the ritual. According to Richard Schechner, the members of the audience have their own role as observers in rituals.¹⁹⁴ In Olufuko, the size of the audience depended on where the event was performed. Outside the Olufuko house the audience was much bigger than inside. The role of the audience was to watch the performances and not to participate. The performance changes when the audience changes.¹⁹⁵ Even if the Olufuko ritual was conducted in a traditional way, the crowd changed the dynamics.

The space of the ritual is very significant because it is usually connected to the biological, geographical, social, historical, and cultural environment.¹⁹⁶ The Olufuko Festival is arranged annually in the geographical heart of the Ovambo society. The setting for Olufuko was built by the Outapi Town Council and by the

¹⁹³ Schechner 1985, 130.

¹⁹⁴ Schechner 1985, 10.

¹⁹⁵ Schechner and Appel 1990, 4.

¹⁹⁶ Grimes 2014, 259.

Olufuko preparatory committee and it aimed to present the cultural-historical background of the Olufuko. The ritual took place at the Olufuko house which was a traditional kraal. The space of the Olufuko events shows whether the occasion was meant to be seen or not and whether it was for a big public or just for a small audience. Did the event take place onstage or backstage? As I mentioned earlier, some of the events happened inside the Olufuko house and some were outside. The events that took place outside the house had a bigger audience whereas the events for a smaller crowd happened inside the house.

The events that took place outside the Olufuko house were the greeting of the chief, the early morning visits to the toilet, drinking oshihupaela, serving food at the etambo, going around the house on the fourth day, jumping over the fire, as well as ploughing seeds and collecting firewood on the fifth day. What does this tell us? Except for the early morning toilet visits all the events were for a larger public. The toilet visit was an intimate event because it was done very early in the morning and it was done outside the Olufuko house because the majority of the facilities were there. The viewers of the public events were the festival visitors, vendors, parents, relatives, and the media. In the parts of the ritual that were conducted outside and were public all the girls were in the same big group. Every public event started at the etambo. The girls were seated in front of the house and after that the event could start.

The indoor events were more intimate, in practical terms due to lack of space for the audience inside the house, but that was not the only reason. If the organisers had wanted the performance for a bigger audience, the events would have taken place outside the house. For example, the fertility rite was a very intimate event and it was conducted inside where only the initiates, the mothers, the Meekulus, the Namungangas, and just a few spectators, mainly from the UNAM research team, were present. Other indoor events were the moulding of traditional stoves, pounding mahangu grains, entering the ondjugo, and the wiping ceremony.

The Olufuko ritual events took place at different times of the day. Most of the events took place just before midday or in the afternoon. Only entering the ondjugo took place when the sun had set and the visits to the toilet took place before the sun had risen. On the hottest time of the day, around one o'clock in the afternoon, there were not supposed to be any activities. This was not always the case because sometimes the schedules got delayed and therefore the timing had to

change. Most of the afternoon events took place late in the afternoon (figure 3, below). It was explained to me that the cooler time of the day symbolises a cooler mind. It is very common in Namibia to think that the cold weather gives strength to the body and mind.

The objects that were used in Olufuko were traditional Ovambo objects. In figure 3, I have sorted all the objects that were used in the ritual. Some of the initiates had horsetail whisks for covering their faces. Some of the mothers had similar whisks and they whipped them around as they were singing and celebrating. The pots and cups that were used for serving food and oshihupaela were all clean and new. Especially the wooden cups had to be brand new. The pounding equipment was provided by the Olufuko Festival Committee. It was logistically convenient that the initiates used the same equipment. In the fertility rite,¹⁹⁷ the girls were given a salt brick which symbolised their baby.

The Olufuko house was built according to Oshimbandja tradition. The girls slept in camping tents inside the traditional house. The festival area had running water and other modern-day facilities. The vendors at the festival area had concession stands as in any contemporary festival. The Olufuko house was built only for this occasion and it is not used at other times of the year. Every material aspect that represented the tradition was built only for the festival. To be accurate, the whole Olufuko Festival area is not used outside the annual festival in late August. The town of Outapi is planning to transform the area into a year-round Olufuko Centre. The Outapi Town Council showed us, the UNAM-team, a design of the festival area. According to that plan, they are going to build a hotel with a VIP-area, an Olufuko-museum, and a performance stage, among other things. The idea is to make the Olufuko Festival area into an Olufuko Centre that would draw tourist the whole year round and the festival would then always be organised there. It seems that if the plan goes through, then the divide between the tradition and the festival will increase. It would lead to a situation where a traditional ritual is performed in an environment that resembles a shopping centre.

After such changes, the question whether the ritual has anything to do with tradition is raised. Or is it becoming the same thing as Schechner's description of the 'mudmen'? The 'mudmen' ritual used to be practised when the villagers felt

¹⁹⁷ By fertility rite I mean the events that took place on the fifth day. The initiates gave birth figuratively and named the newly born.

threatened but now it is done for entertaining the tourists.¹⁹⁸ Is the Olufuko ritual turning from an initiation ritual into entertainment? Is the ritual performance changing from transformation into transportation? Usually the rites of passage are seen as transformative, but the new situation of the Olufuko Festival could lead to a point where the ritual is performed more as amusement and then the ritual would change into a transportation performance.

Tradition and commercialism keep balancing at the Olufko Festival. While businesses try to benefit from the event through promotion, the tradition seeks to uphold something old. People go through the ritual because their grandparents and their parents have gone through it as well. Tradition is seen as unchanging and as a part of culture. According to the Olufuko Magazine:

Founding President Sam Nujoma expressed his happiness to this fact, stressing that the presence of many traditional leaders at Olufuko Festival is a clear testimony of the commitment to the preservation of our culture and traditions as well as the consolidation of Government's efforts to promote national identity and national pride.¹⁹⁹

In the same article, the writer describes how president Nujoma was pleased to hear about the local and regional exhibitors who promote the regional economies. He sees the Olufuko Festival as a platform where local economic activity increases and jobs are created.

The girls' initiation ritual at the Olufuko Festival tends to promote the old tradition of the Ovambo people. It is advertised as a traditional ritual, practised long before Christianity and colonialism came to Namibia. At the same time, around this traditional event, a cultural festival thrives. Catherine Bell argues rituals tend to maintain unchanging time-honoured customs, but at the same time they need to adapt to contemporary needs.²⁰⁰ The festival served the needs of the contemporary festival visitor with food, beverages, and music for the festival audience. The ritual itself served the needs of tradition.

¹⁹⁸ Schechner 1988, 125–138.

¹⁹⁹ Schechner 1988, 125–138.

²⁰⁰ Bell 1997, 210, 220.

Figure 3

Activities	Space		Time				Participants	Audience	Objects
	Inside	Outside	Morning	Midday	Afternoon	Evening			
Day 1									
Greeting the chief		Public			Late afternoon		Initiates, flowergirls	Parents, visitors	Horsetail whisks, flags indicating the colour of the tribes
Day 2									
Toilet		Intimate	Early morning				Initiates	–	–
Moulding stoves	Intimate		Early morning				Relatives (women)	–	Clay
Drinking oshihupaela		Public		x			Initiates, flowergirls, eembuhiki	Parents, visitors	Wooden cups, calabash
Pounding paternal mahangu	Intimate			x			Initiates, mothers	Parents	Mahangu grain, pounding equipment, lotion
Serving dinner		Public			x		Initiates, flowergirls, eembuhiki	Parents, visitors	Pots of food
Day 3									
Toilet		Intimate	Early morning				Initiates	–	–
Pounding maternal mahangu	Intimate		x				Initiates, mothers	Parents	Mahangu grain, pounding equipment, lotion
Serving lunch		Public		x			Initiates, flowergirls, eembuhiki	Parents, visitors	Pots of food
Serving dinner		Public			x		Initiates, flowergirls, eembuhiki	Parents, visitors	Pots of food
Day 4									
Toilet		Intimate	Early morning				Initiates	–	–
Going around the house		Public			Late afternoon		Initiates	Parents, visitors	–
Entering the Ondjugo	Intimate					x	Initiates	Parents	–
Day 5									
Fertility rite	Intimate			x			Initiates	Parents	Omalovu, herbs, mahangu flour, salt brick, ostrich shell beads
Jumping over the fire		Public			Late afternoon		Initiates, mothers	Parents, visitors	Twig, fire, stick
Ploughing seeds		Public			Late afternoon		Initiates, mothers	Parents, visitors	Mattock
Collecting firewood		Public			Late afternoon		Initiates, mothers	Parents, visitors	–
Day 6									
Wiping	Intimate		x				Initiates, mothers	Parents	Wash cloth

5. Olufuko Festival 2016 – Responses and Reactions

According to the World Factbook provided by the CIA, 80 to 90 % of the Namibian population are Christians and approximately 50 % of them are Lutherans.²⁰¹ ELCIN, being the biggest Lutheran church in Namibia, has a big influence in people's lives. Therefore, it is worthwhile to start the discussion on the opinions of Olufuko from ELCIN's stance. After that, I continue with the Anglican Church's stance because it differs from ELCIN's. Following the churches' views, I look into NamRights, the human rights organization, and then the different stances of the people. I present them in this order because the church has a big influence in people's lives and the families balance between upholding tradition and the view of the church in their daily lives.

5.1. ELCIN

Since the first year of Olufuko Festival, ELCIN has opposed the event. ELCIN had a pastors' conference at Ongwediva Western Diocese Conference Centre on 16th–19th of July in 2012. After that conference, on July 19th 2012 ELCIN released a pastoral letter for the press. In that letter they condemned the Olufuko practice as being “against the Biblical teachings and principles”. According to ELCIN, “it infringes upon Christian values and morals” and “encourages the youth to practice promiscuities which may also lead to the spread of HIV/AIDS and other related diseases”. I have not been able to find any research to endorse this argument. I asked about it at the church office in Oniipa, but nobody would point out any facts that would be in favour of this claim. Nevertheless, with this letter to the press the church plead their members to stay away from Olufuko. The letter was signed by Bishop Shekutaamba Nambala on behalf of all ELCIN pastors.

Emeritus Bishop Josaphat Shanghala, who retired in 2014, clarifies the church's stance by saying that the tradition (which includes Olufuko) goes one direction and Christianity goes another. He sees them as two railway lines that go parallel but never meet. According to him, Olufuko is cultural worship which does not belong to the church because the church has a different culture. “We cannot merge these two. It is different tradition. If you try to make to, you study

²⁰¹ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/geos/wa.html>

syncretism. It's a kind of syncretism. We are not for the syncretism",²⁰² the Bishop argues. According to Shanghala, the solution would be that those who want to practice traditional things such as Olufuko seceded from the church and practice their tradition outside it. But if one wants to be a part of the church, then they would have to abandon their traditional habits and rituals. In this way, the Bishop has a very conservative interpretation of religion. According to him, when a young couple live together but are not married, then they are not living according to Christian standards: "It is a confusion of Christianity and culture".²⁰³

Bishop Shanghala thinks that the church needs to be patient with its members. According to him there are people who are still growing into Christian faith and that "you have to be patient with them, because the understanding of Christianity doesn't come in one day. It has to take long process." The Bishop pointed out that the church does not excommunicate its members who take part in Olufuko, but the church disciplines them through education. The church provides counselling because people are doing things without knowing that they are making mistakes. He sees that the church's job is to guide its members to the right path:

Not, we don't say people are righteous, but we preach to become a righteous life, to follow righteous life. I can't say all the Christians, or me or you are the righteous people, but by faith, by the grace of God, you become a righteous person. You can be saved. But not, but I cannot be saved by tradition.²⁰⁴

According to the *New Era Newspaper*, bishop Shekutamba Nambala condemned the practise of Olufuko during his sermon on Sunday 17.9.2017 in Windhoek.²⁰⁵ The article reported that bishop Nambala stated:

We have not been convinced about its [Olufuko] usefulness – instead we are seeing contradictions in relation to the practice when viewed from a legal perspective. The people who are initiated through Olufuko are regarded as ready to get married, but at the same time the law is clear that minors cannot get married.²⁰⁶

This argument shows that the bishop sees the initiates as fiancés who are soon going to get married. According to my understanding, this was not the case in Olufuko Festival 2016. I met some of the girls who had gone through Olufuko in the past few years and none of these girls were married. I am aware that to be certain of this argument one would need further research, where the researcher could dig into what happened to the girls after the initiation. There is no statistics

²⁰² All the information provided from the Bishop Shanghala is from the interview with him on 29.8.2016 at his house in Outapi.

²⁰³ Interview with Bishop Shanghala 29.8.2016.

²⁰⁴ Interview with Bishop Shanghala 29.8.2016.

²⁰⁵ New Era, 19.9.2017.

²⁰⁶ New Era, 19.9.2017.

available of how many of the initiates got married in the first few years after the initiation. According to the New Era article bishop Nambala had hinted “that parents who took their children to the Olufuko Festival may in the future be stripped of church privileges, including receiving holy communion.”²⁰⁷ Not to be able to attend the holy communion is a severe punishment in a country where the churches are full of people during Sunday sermons.

5.2. The Anglican Church

Reverend Phillipus Kashima from the Anglican Church summarized his stance on Olufuko by saying:

When you see if a lady pass through the initiation school. People, the families, they are all happy. They slaughter cattle, they bring a lot of gifts, and they make a lot of noises, they are dancing.²⁰⁸

He does not see anything bad in people being happy and celebrating and according to him that is what Olufuko is all about. He sees Olufuko as the better option in a situation, where the other leads to sadness and disappointment because a girl is pregnant without going through Olufuko. In other words, Reverend Kashima understands Olufuko through people’s reactions. When a girl attends Olufuko, people are happy and celebrating. When a girl does not go through Olufuko and gets pregnant, then the family and people around her will be disappointed.

When Reverend Kashima was asked how the Olufuko fit into the religious life of an African Anglican, he did not see a problem with that. According to him, the Anglican Church in Namibia had gathered up a team to find out whether there was any sinful activity in Olufuko or not and the result of their inquiry was that nothing controversial occurred. I asked for access to a hard copy of this study, but the reverend told me that it was made a long time ago and he could not remember where it is kept. Reverend Kashima wanted to emphasise that the Anglican Church was a part of a discussion on Namibian theology:

We [Reverend Kashima and Dr. Kapolo from ELCIN] were discussing theology in our context. And we called it a contextual theology. That is including our life here, in Namibia. We are doing our theology here! In Namibia. [...] The message I have is that whether you like or not people are doing African practice. Whether we don’t

²⁰⁷ New Era, 19.9.2017.

²⁰⁸ All the information provided from Reverend Kashima is from the interview with him on 30.8.2016 at his office in Outapi.

like, whether we don't believe in that Olufuko which is being done here, people are doing it in their own houses. (Laughing) They are doing it!²⁰⁹

The Reverend wanted to point out that Namibia had to construct their theology so that it could adopt the norms and culture of the surrounding society. Therefore, the church had to take a closer look at the initiation rite and find out whether it was appropriate for a Christian or not. Where Bishop Shanghala sees the parishioners as children who need guidance to the right path, Reverend Kashima sees the people as active members and the church needs to adapt to their life – not the other way around. This explains the differing stances to Olufuko. ELCIN sees that Olufuko is not a part of the church's tradition and the Anglican church views Olufuko as a part of life and culture and therefore finds it acceptable.

Regardless of Reverend Kashima's tolerance towards Olufuko, the Anglican Church's stand is not as simple. The members who participate in Olufuko have to attend penance.

...even the parents who took their children to the initiation school, themselves they feel that they committed something... sin. This why most of them they took their children to the olufuko, when after olufuko they bring their children to the penance. [...] That's the policy, which put up by the church after that. Because there are so many people who are doubt about it.²¹⁰

From Reverend Kashima's point of view, penance is necessary because people feel guilty. The church's request for penance signifies that there is something in Olufuko that people regret, otherwise there would not be any need for penance.

5.3. *NamRights*

NamRights is a human rights organization operating in Namibia. Its founder and executive director is Phil ya Nangoloh who has criticized the Olufuko practice as a violation of human rights. Nangoloh sees Olufuko as child marriage, which should be condemned and stopped. UNICEF published Phil ya Nangoloh's statement on Olufuko in 2014, but specified that the views were the author's and "do not necessarily reflect the policies or the views of UNICEF".²¹¹

According to Nangoloh, Olufuko is a traditional wedding ceremony where young girls as young as 12 years are joined to adult men.²¹² In an email correspondence with Nangoloh, he calls Olufuko as a scourge:

²⁰⁹ Interview with Reverend Kashima, 30.8.2016.

²¹⁰ Interview with Reverend Kashima, 30.8.2016.

²¹¹ Nangoloh 2014, 2.

²¹² Nangoloh 2014, 2.

...because Olufuko is effectively child marriage and hence a grave violation of human rights. It is a harmful traditional practice which is outlawed by international human rights law to which Namibia is party.²¹³

He also compares Olufuko to human trafficking because according to him the majority of these girls are brought from Angola. These girls are from poor backgrounds and exploited to attract men.²¹⁴ In the Olufuko Festival 2016 it was clear that the girls came from different backgrounds. There were initiates who came from Angola or had Angolan background, but these girls seemed to form the minority.

Phil Nangoloh understands Olufuko as a child marriage and therefore he sees that the ritual violates human rights:

The fact is: like all other forms of child marriage olufuko not only robs Namibian girl children of their childhood---which is the time necessary for them to develop physically, emotionally and psychologically--- but the HTP [Harmful Traditional Practices] also blatantly infringes upon all and any children's rights recognized under national and international law.²¹⁵

The child marriages not only affect the life of the child but also have civil and political consequences. According to Nangoloh, Olufuko leads to early maternity, which affects the girl's attendance at school. Early maternity also shortens the life expectancy of the girl. Nangoloh also points out that the ritual consists of different humiliating and derogatory steps such as virginity and pregnancy testing. In 2012, NamRights plead to President Pohamba for him to intervene and prevent that girls under the age of 18 would go through Olufuko. Girls above 18 should only participate of their free will and not be forced by their society.²¹⁶

5.4. The Parents and the Relatives of the Initiates

Namibia's society is hierarchical. Seniors are respected and they have a high status in the community. Children are taught to respect and listen to their parents and elders. Therefore, it is significant to learn what the parents of the initiates think about Olufuko.

We interviewed 25 parents at the Olufuko Festival. Some of the parents were not the girls' biological parents, but were appointed as their guardians by the parents. These people are also categorised as parents to make it easier to handle a big amount of interview texts. It was not always obvious if the respondent was the biological parent or not, but it was clear that they were there for the girl and that

²¹³ Nangoloh, email correspondence 29.5.2017.

²¹⁴ Nangoloh, email correspondence 29.5.2017.

²¹⁵ Nangoloh 2014, 2.

²¹⁶ Nangoloh 2014, 2.

they were the guardians of the girl. Other members of the research group mainly did the interviews with the parents. This was because the parents did not speak English and therefore the interviews had to be done in Oshiwambo. From answers to the question, why was it important to bring the girl to be initiated, two main points emerged: to keep up with the tradition and to avoid the stigma of being pregnant without initiation. The parents wanted their daughters to go through the same steps as their grandmothers. This way the girl would be linked to their culture and family:

Parent 8_EK: It is important that she get initiated in oshiwambo tradition, like I also did. She should follow her mother's culture who brought her on this earth.

Parent 3_NS: mmmm, olufuko, olufuko is a nice thing. Also we have followed our traditions and we have been told long ago by our mothers that since we have existed people get initiated. So I said hey, since it is back, we shall also follow what we have found long practised by our mothers.

The other reason why the parents wanted their child to attend Olufuko was that it should be done before the girls gets pregnant:

Parent1_NS: To go through before she does things quickly [meaning getting pregnant] because she is grown.

Parent 7_EK: We found the initiation practice, and it gives me happiness as I brought her because it [Olufuko] washes away taboo. My heart feels guilty if I let her uninitiated[...]

Many of the parents saw their girl growing and that the girl had started to menstruate. This meant that the girl would be physiologically old enough to have children. Therefore, the parents took their girl to Olufuko for her to avoid the stigma that would come along if a girl got pregnant before Olufuko, a shameful thing for the whole family. To avoid this embarrassment, the girls were taken to Outapi to go through the initiation. After the ritual, the girl would be socially allowed to get pregnant. Despite the fact that pregnancy was allowed after Olufuko, all the adults at the Olufuko Festival encouraged the girls to finish their school before stepping into motherhood.

People who brought their daughters were not afraid to do against the church's will. They were not afraid to be excommunicated from the church even though there were rumours about excommunication:

Parent 4_NS: I am not afraid to be excommunicated from the congregation of my church, if I have to repent? I will do my penance because we are told to forgive seventy times seventy.

Parent 5_NS: oh, a person can just go for repentance at the church. If they do not want to forgive me, no matter, I shall remain with my pagan ways.

The parents felt that following their cultural traditions was more important than the church's request to avoid Olufuko. The tradition of Olufuko has been in Namibia longer than the culture that the church represents.

5.5. The Initiates

The idea of participation in Olufuko came mainly from the parents of the initiates. Approximately 61 % of the initiates we interviewed answered that it was their parent's decision to come to Olufuko:

Initiate 4_SK: Yeah, It's my parents signed me. I must come to do Olufuko things because if something happen to me maybe I'm going to get pregnant and I did not do Olufuko things they come shout me.

Old initiate 2_SK: It was 2012 [the year of the initiation]. I did it just because I want to... It was not my willing, it was my parents willing. Then I have to do it because my parents want me to do it.

Initiate 14_SK: It was more or less of a push and pull force. First my dad came up with the idea that my grandmother did. And then I eventually gave into. They are forcing you having to go and then I ended up coming here.

The girls whose parents made the decision had no other choice than to participate in Olufuko. It is an unwritten norm in Namibia that children should not stand against their parents. 26 % of the initiates who were interviewed told that the idea to participate came from themselves and 13 % said that it was a mutual understanding:

Saara: Okay. So, who decided that you should come to Olufuko this year?

Initiate 20_SK: My parents and myself.

Saara: Okay, and why?

Initiate 20_SK: Because it's something that's done by our gran-gran-gran past years. And we need to follow the examples.

Some of the interviewees said that Olufuko was a part of their culture and that they wanted to participate in Olufuko out of respect. It was important for them to practise a ritual that their grandmothers and their mothers had gone through before. It was the same argumentation that came up with the parents. The initiates wanted to have a link to their ancestors. By practising a ritual that has been practised by their mothers and grandmothers, the girls felt a sense of belonging to their cultural heritage. One of the initiates told me about her father, who had gone through acrisis of identity and consequently had started to become interested in his cultural background. This lead to the girl's attendance at Olufuko:

Saara: But your father decided this for you. So how come... Why did he decide it?

Initiate 14_SK: My dad went through a life changing phase. Not like life changing phase but like a discovering phase where he basically discovered himself. Because after living in Germany for so long like he was basically ripped off his culture and he didn't really know how to fit anymore. So he had to relearn the culture and relearn everything that he originally learned when he was younger but then has to

relearn it one way or another. So... My dad just decided one day like "okay... I want my daughter to go through Olufuko so she can not suffer the burden that I had to go through".

Another issue that arose from the interviews with the girls was the idea to avoid stigmatisation, as it did from the interviews with the parents. Both groups were worried about reputation. This is probably a result of the parents sharing their worldviews and values to posterity:

Initiate 21_SK: They [parents] told us that if we get pregnant without going this process we might... the girls outside might insult us or laugh at us because we are young and we did not go in this process while we are pregnant.

Some of the girls mentioned that by attending Olufuko, they avoid being called names such as *onsimba kathona* or *shikumbu*. These words were translated to me as 'bitch' or 'whore'. Girls who become pregnant before they pass through the ritual are called by these names.

5.6. Visitors of the Olufuko Festival

The Olufuko research team interviewed 28 visitors of the Olufuko Festival. The range of the respondents was wide. Some of them were from around Outapi, but some of the interviewees were from as far as California, United States. This affected the answers. The people who were from the Omusati region were familiar with Olufuko, but the ones from a longer distance thought that the festival was just a trade fair. The majority of the visitors were from the Ovambo cultural background and Olufuko was more or less familiar to them.

As I have explained in the earlier chapters, the Olufuko Festival was more than just an initiation ritual. People who came to the festival area were also interested in its commercial side:

Visitor 12_SK: Well I think I just came to support these businesses in Olufuko. And also just to observe what is happening here basically.

Visitor 6_SK: I just came to... I was working at the Ongwediva trade fare and some of my friends said that there's a festival going on up here, so I took the day off and came up here.

Some of the visitors were more interested in the shops and exhibitions than the initiation itself. These people would have come to the festival even if the initiation had not been a part of it. Most of the respondents seemed to be interested in the controversial ritual. From their point of view, the ritual is a part of their culture and these respondents wanted to see and learn more about their tradition:

Visitor 3_SK: I want to know many things about the culture. The Ovambo culture. I'm also from Ovambo culture.

Visitor 7_SK: I came here because this thing about Olufuko it's like touching my culture like that, because I'm Ovambo. I'm half Ovambo and half Kavango so I'm Ovambo by my mother's side. So I have to represent my culture.

Visitor 10_SK: We just came to see how Olufuko is. We only heard Olufuko but we don't know what is Olufuko.

My assumption was that the people who opposed Olufuko would not attend the festival. But as I talked to people at the festival area, I noticed that I was mistaken. Some of the people had adamant opinions about Olufuko:

Visitor 12_SK: Well I think I'm mostly supporting those churches. You see sometimes we... these things they don't match with our Christianity. It's not morally correct to find those ladies there with, with their breasts out there and everybody is taking pictures of them and taking them to Facebook. It's not correct. Because even those politicians who are talking there, none of their children are coming here to Olufuko. But they won't... All those, if you make a research, all those children are children of poor people who are coming here. And they are the ones to be exposed by all this things. It's immoral! And it's not correct. [...]

The respondent had come to the festival to support the local vendors. In addition to the Olufuko Festival of 2016, the respondent had also attended the festival in previous years. He was worried about the combination of the girls and social media. Nowadays, many people have a camera on their mobile phones, making photographing an ordinary thing. According to my observations, it was true that there were people taking pictures or selfies with the girls. It is not clear what they did with those pictures. My assumption is that some of the pictures might have ended up on Facebook or other social media channels. How does this affect the girls in the future? Did people ask permission to publish these pictures? These are some of the questions that need more research.

Most people were there to have fun. The festival area was full of food and drink vendors. People were sitting at the tables in front of the food tents and passing their time. In the evenings, some of the food tents were playing music to entertain their customers. At daytime, people were curious to see bits and pieces of the traditional and controversial ritual. Most visitors seemed to think positively about Olufuko.

5.7. Opposition Vs. Defenders

The reviving of Olufuko has raised mixed emotions. Some Namibians think that the Olufuko ritual is a part of their old tradition and that they should preserve it. At the same time some Namibians understand Olufuko as a child marriage ceremony that is harmful to young girls and should not be practised by Christians. ELCIN and NamRights are the strongest objectors to Olufuko. The pro-Olufuko

side consists of the organisers and parents. In this chapter I analyse the argument between these two sides.

Emeritus bishop Josaphat Shanghala sees Olufuko as a pagan practise. NamRights' executive director Phil ya Nangoloh sees Olufuko as an archaic traditional wedding ceremony where girls as young as 12 years are "inaugurated and converted into adult women."²¹⁷ It is interesting that Nangoloh uses the term 'convert', when he speaks about the transformation from girlhood into adulthood, as the term is usually used when discussing converting from one religion into another. Both ELCIN and NamRights condemn the practise of Olufuko. The pastoral letter and the UNICEF publication both indicate that Olufuko leads to the spreading of HIV/AIDS and to unwanted pregnancies.

A common problem, leading to misunderstandings, is the use of the English term 'traditional marriage', often used in discussions about Olufuko. It implies that the girls who are initiated are going to get married and that Olufuko is one part of the marriage process. In a way it is true. After Olufuko, the girls have become women and are now able to get married and pregnant in a socially acceptable way, but this does not mean that they will do it straight away after the ritual. One of my informants, who took part in Olufuko in 2013, thought that she would get married straight after Olufuko, but she was relieved when she discovered that this was not the case.

Old Initiate 1_SK: Yeah, it [Olufuko] was okay, it is not what I expected because before I took part of Olufuko I was told that once you took part you get married or maybe you meet a husband during the festival. Someone would come tie something on you and that will be your husband. But this was actually different. 'Cause for me I didn't get married, I'm a student, I'm still independent, I'm on my own. I'm not having a husband.

Saara: Okay. Are you satisfied how it went or would you have wanted to find your husband here or?

Old Initiate 1_SK: No, no, no... I didn't want to take part on the Olufuko because I thought I'm gonna meet my husband here and I didn't want it. I wanted to meet someone that I'll meet myself and I'll make my own decision. And right now I'm not getting a husband and I'm still waiting for that right person so... I feel good that it's not what's going out right now it's something different.

This also shows that the initiates were not aware what actually happens during Olufuko. Many of them had heard bits and pieces of the ritual but it seemed that none of them had a clear picture of Olufuko.

According to Audrey Richards, most puberty rituals precede the marriage ceremony. In her study among the Bemba in Zambia she noted that the Bemba

²¹⁷ "Olufuko Festival has unified five regions into one" – Nujoma, *Olufuko Magazine* Vol. 4, p. 5 (author unknown).

frequently confused the initiation ritual and the marriage ceremony.²¹⁸ Märta Salokoski points out that traditionally the Ovambo initiation ritual was followed by a quite modest marriage ceremony.²¹⁹ Traditionally, in Ovambo culture, there have been two different rituals: the girls' initiation and marriage. This could explain the misunderstanding. The wedding ceremony used to come quite soon after the initiation rite and this could lead to the misunderstanding that the marriage ritual and the initiation are the same. I argue that the Olufuko ritual is not a traditional marriage and that in fact the use of this term is misleading and gives the wrong impression of the ritual, implying that the girls are wed in the course of the ritual. This leads to the rumours that older men come to Olufuko to marry young and underage girls. One of the reasons why some people react to Olufuko negatively could be because the initiation ritual is understood as a marriage practise. For example, NamRights executive director Phil ya Nangoloh uses harsh words when he speaks about Olufuko which he sees as a traditional marriage: "I chose to concentrate on the disgusting child marriage scourge locally known as Olufuko."²²⁰

Reverend Kashima of the Anglican Church saw Olufuko as a part of the parishioners' lives. For him, the church should try to understand it and not condemn it. The parents thought that the ritual was cultural heritage and thus should be upheld. The parents also saw that through Olufuko the girls gained a status that allowed them to get pregnant in a socially acceptable way. They did not want the girls to be stigmatized. Girls who get pregnant before going through the initiation are called *onsimba kathona*, bitches or whores, and the parents do not want this label on their girls. The parents and the initiates had very similar opinions on Olufuko. This could be because in the Namibian context the children have to obey their parents. Therefore, the initiates repeated the opinions of their parents. The initiates and the parents wanted to be connected to their ancestors. It came up several times that Olufuko is something that has been practised by the initiates' mothers, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers. It was important to stay connected to that matrilineal chain.

Parents who take their girls to initiation have to suffer some punishment from their parish. As a result, some of the girls and their parents did not tell anybody in the church that the girl was to be initiated. This is interesting because

²¹⁸ Richards 1982, 52–54.

²¹⁹ Salokoski 2006, 237.

²²⁰ Nangoloh 2014, 1.

their surrounding society had to know that the girl was initiated, otherwise the society could wrongly accuse the girl for being onsimba kathon, even though she was initiated. In other words, the congregation has to know about the initiation but the priests do not. In some cases, the mothers were suspended from church.

Old initiate 1_SK: [...]They will suspend you from the church and then you have to attend something in order to be forgiven and you go back in the church again.

Saara: Okay. Did you have that kind of problem?

Old initiate 1_SK: Yeah, I had that kind of problem but I still go to the church even thou they say it... My mother was the one to go there and attend that class to be forgiven. It's actually like an examination. Attend it like for a month and then they give you a book, I forgot the name of the book, and then you have to read the book, go through all the prayers and all that in order to go back in the church again.

Saara: Yes. So when your mother attended for forgiveness, she did it for you?

Old initiate 1_SK: She did it for me so that I could go back to church again.

Saara: Yes, okay. So you don't have to do that? You don't have to...

Old initiate 1_SK: Yes, because it was not form my own will to go to the Olufuko.

What is notable is that the initiates themselves were not seen as responsible actors in the same way as their mothers. The girls had to attend Olufuko because their parents had decided so. Therefore, the punishment fell mainly on the parents and especially the mothers.

6. Conclusion

Olufuko is a girls' initiation ritual, practised in North Namibia among the Ovambo. Olufuko has been an important part of the life of the Ovambo women. Throughout the course of history, Ovambo women have gone through this ritual. A girl could become a respectful woman only by going through the initiation and the whole family would be desecrated if a girl got pregnant before the initiation. In some cases, these pregnant girls were burned to death as punishment for their actions. People still practise the Olufuko ritual even though ELCIN strongly opposes it as a pagan tradition. The town of Outapi has arranged an annual Olufuko Festival since 2012 and it has sparked a renewed argument about the practise.

The Olufuko Festival is arranged in the geographical heart of the Ovambo society in the town of Outapi. The setting of Olufuko at the festival in 2016 was built by the Outapi Town Council and by the Olufuko preparatory committee and it aimed to present the cultural-historical background of the Olufuko. The traditional ritual and the contemporary festival balanced throughout the Olufuko Festival 2016. The ritual took place at the Olufuko house, which was a traditional kraal. In this thesis I studied the Olufuko ritual in the light of performance theory. The six-day-long ritual transformed the initiates into women and in this study I have described the different phases of the Olufuko ritual. This is the first time someone has observed the Olufuko ritual around the clock. The aim of this thesis was to answer the following questions: What happens in Olufuko? What are the different phases of the ritual? What are the different views and opinions on Olufuko? The ritual has strong supporters and opposition, its supporters see Olufuko as a part of upholding the Ovambo tradition and culture, whereas the opposition sees the ritual as a harmful practise that should not be practised in contemporary Namibia.

During the Olufuko week, the initiates went through different phases, which taught them to become women and mothers. The ritual had three phases: preliminal, liminal, and postliminal. On the first day of Olufuko, the initiates were stripped from their old status and they were dressed in traditional clothes. Even though the initiates from the same ethnicity were dressed the same way, they were not egalitarian as Victor Turner argues.²²¹ Every time the initiates lined up in the Olufuko ritual, they had a specific order. The first girl in the queue was the

²²¹ Turner 1969, 95.

daughter of the chief of Ombalantu. Being first in line signified and showed her higher social status. In the liminal phase of the ritual the initiates were symbolically trained how to be women. The tasks they did during the ritual were the same tasks that are traditionally made by women. The transition to the postliminal phase started on the fourth day after the initiates had entered the ondjugo through the legs of the Namunganga. On the fifth day, the girls were trained to become mothers.

Performance can be divided into two separate groups: transportation and transformation. Initiation rituals, such as Olufuko, are seen as transformative. They transform a person from one social status to another and the transformation is permanent. Performances such as theatre, on the other hand, are seen as transportation performances. In theatre, the actor is only temporarily in a new role but eventually the actor returns to the same status as in the beginning. The Olufuko ritual transformed the girls into women but it also transported the co-performers and their role was not changed permanently.

The ritual agents the Namungangas, and the ritual assistants the Meekulus, were the transported actors. Their role as mediators lasted only for that specific period and they were not transformed permanently. These mediators conveyed the initiates from girlhood to womanhood and the ritual transformed the girls into women. To become a woman the initiates needed the ritual and the ritual agent as well. Other transported actors were the Eembuhiki and the Oufukwena who returned to their role as children after the ritual had ended.

The Olufuko Festival was not just a girls' initiation ritual, it was also a cultural festival. The Outapi Town Council had hired exhibitors to present traditional agricultural objects and crafts and vendors selling Bibles, clothes, and food were also present. The town council wanted to lift the visibility and the attractiveness of the town and get the tourists and investors to stay longer in Outapi. This is one of the main reasons why the town decided to arrange the annual Olufuko Festival. Tradition and commercialism balanced at the festival. The girls represented the tradition with their outfit, behaviour, and the initiation. At the same time the shops and evening entertainment were commercial in nature.

The town of Outapi is planning to transform the Olufuko Festival area into a year-round Olufuko Centre that would draw tourists the whole year round and be the venue for the annual Olufuko Festival. It raises the question whether the Olufuko ritual is turning from an initiation ritual to entertainment? Is the ritual

performance changing from transformation into transportation? Usually the rites of passage are seen as transformative but the new situation of the Olufuko Festival could lead to a point where the ritual is performed more as amusement that would result in the ritual changing into a transportation performance.

The Olufuko Festival and the Olufuko ritual arouse different opinions. On one side, there are the defenders of Olufuko who want to uphold their old tradition. By supporting their rituals, they feel connected to their ancestors. On the other side, there are the objectors who see the Olufuko tradition as a contradiction to Christian lifestyle. In some cases, Olufuko is also seen as a human rights violation where the girls are forced to attend the rite against their will and as supporting child marriages.

One of the important issues that I noticed in various argumentations was that Olufuko was translated as 'traditional marriage'. This term gives a wrong connotation to the ritual. According to my observations, the ritual was an initiation ritual but not a marriage rite. Olufuko ritual was all about the girls turning into women. In the eyes of their society, after the initiation, these women would be able to get married. I have to emphasise that there were not any men testing the girls' virginity at the Olufuko Festival 2016. There were no sexual acts or marriage ceremonies either.

Another meaningful thing was to notice the same arguments that the girls and their parents had. The initiates and the parents thought that it is good to uphold the tradition and that the ritual prevents stigmatisation. Even though in many cases the parents made the decision of the participation to the ritual, the girls agreed with them about the reasons why it is important to go through the Olufuko. Of course, there is a slight possibility that these arguments of the girls were learned from the parents and do not represent their true opinions.

The girls' initiation ritual at the Olufuko Festival tends to promote the old tradition of the Ovambo people. It is advertised as a traditional ritual, practised long before Christianity and colonialism came to Namibia. At the same time, around this traditional event, there was the cultural festival. The festival served the needs of the contemporary festival visitor with food, beverages, and music. The ritual itself served the needs of tradition.

It seems to me that if the plan of the Outapi Town Council goes through, then the divide between the tradition and the festival increases. If the visitor count increases, what does this mean to the initiates? The young girls would be in their

traditional clothes, bare breasted as people would come and watch the ritual and take pictures of the initiates. At the Olufuko Festival 2016, I observed that people took selfies with the girls and posted them on social media. How would this affect the girls? Many people at the Olufuko Festival saw the Olufuko ritual as an important practise which should be upheld. The problem as I see it is that the world has changed and the woman's body is now seen differently than in 19th century Ovambo society. In my view, this should not be ignored and the organisers should be aware that social media and the Internet might be the intermediators for abuse. How can the town council assure that the people who come to see the initiation will not harm the young girls, intentionally or unintentionally? The initiates themselves do not have much to say on Olufuko. The decision to attend was usually made by their parents and the girls had to obey them.

For future research it would be interesting to study how Olufuko affects the lives of the initiates? How does their role in the society change? Does their life change after the initiation? How many of them will get married in the next five years?

Interviews

The code of the interviews is as follows:

Initiate 1_SK

The first word indicates the category of the interview. There are three categories: initiate, parent, and visitor. The initiate indicates the girls who were initiated in the Olufuko Festival 2016. The parent indicates the guardians who were interviewed during the festival. The visitor category is the people who visited the Olufuko Festival 2016. There is also a fourth category: old initiates. These are young women who were initiated in the previous years. The number, which comes after the category is the number of the interview from the interviewer. The letter that comes after the number indicates who was interviewing. All the tapes are kept in Windhoek, Namibia, in the custody of UNAM.

SK = Saara Kuoppala

NS = Nena Shivute

EK = Erastus Kautondokwa

INITIATES

Initiate 1_SK	Initiate 15_SK	Initiate 6_NS
Initiate 2_SK	Initiate 16_SK	Initiate 7_NS
Initiate 3_SK	Initiate 17_SK	Initiate 8_NS
Initiate 4_SK	Initiate 18_SK	Initiate 9_NS
Initiate 5_SK	Initiate 19_SK	Initiate 10_NS
Initiate 6_SK	Initiate 20_SK	Initiate 11_NS
Initiate 7_SK	Initiate 21_SK	Initiate 1_EK.
Initiate 8_SK	Initiate 22_SK	
Initiate 9_SK	Initiate 23_SK	Old Initiate 1_SK
Initiate 10_SK	Initiate 1_NS	Old Initiate 2_SK
Initiate 11_SK	Initiate 2_NS	Old Initiate 3_SK
Initiate 12_SK	Initiate 3_NS	Old Initiate 4_SK
Initiate 13_SK	Initiate 4_NS	Old Initiate 5_SK.
Initiate 14_SK	Initiate 5_NS	

Additional interview with Nena 20.2.2017, interviewer Saara Kuoppala.

PARENTS

Parent 1_SK	Parent 10_NS	Parent 1_EK
Parent 2_SK	Parent 11_NS	Parent 2_EK
Parent 3_NS	Parent 12_NS	Parent 3_EK
Parent 4_NS	Parent 13_NS	Parent 4_EK
Parent 5_NS	Parent 14_NS	Parent 5_EK
Parent 6_NS	Parent 15_NS	Parent 6_EK
Parent 7_NS	Parent 16_NS	Parent 7_EK
Parent 8_NS	Parent 17_NS	Parent 8_EK.
Parent 9_NS		

VISITORS

Visitor 1_SK	Visitor 2_NS	Visitor 1_EK
Visitor 2_SK	Visitor 3_NS	Visitor 2_EK.
Visitor 3_SK	Visitor 4_NS	
Visitor 4_SK	Visitor 5_NS	
Visitor 5_SK	Visitor 6_NS	
Visitor 6_SK	Visitor 7_NS	
Visitor 7_SK	Visitor 8_NS	
Visitor 8_SK	Visitor 9_NS	
Visitor 9_SK	Visitor 10_NS	
Visitor 10_SK	Visitor 11_NS	
Visitor 11_SK	Visitor 12_NS	
Visitor 12_SK	Visitor 13_NS	
Visitor 1_NS	Visitor 17_NS	

RITUAL CONDUCTORS

Namunganga Maria 29.8.2016.

Namunganga Ekotolo 27.8.2016.

Meme Mukulu 24.8.2016.

CHURCH REPRESENTATIVES

Emeritus Bishop Josaphat Shanghala 29.8.2016, (ELCIN).

Reverent Phillipus Kashima, 30.8.2016, (Anglican Church).

ORGANISERS

Olufuko Festival organisers 17.5.2016.

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